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CHRISTIAN COURIER

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After Sri Lankan war ends, mission work begins . . . p. 8

Garden of banishment; garden of grace ...p. 12

63rd year of publication

Who decides when I should die?

Proposed Bill will legalize euthanasia

Here is my servant, whom I uphold.... A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out. Isaiah 42:1a, 3a

Derek Miedema

OTTAWA – As you read this, Parliament is deliberating on a Bill, proposed by a Bloq Quebecois MP, which would make it legal to determine the place, time and circumstances of your own death. When she introduced C-384 into the House of Commons for debate, Francine Lalonde described this "right to die with dignity" as the "ultimate compassion" for people suffering unbearably.

Francine Lalonde plans to push ahead with plans to relaunch the debate on euthanesia and assisted suicide

Once you get past the euphemisms, however, the reality is this: under the proposed law, anyone 18 or older who is depressed and has "no hope for recovery" could request to die when and how he or she wanted, and the law would say yes. It would make euthanasia (killing someone at his request) and assisted suicide (providing the means for someone to kill himself) legal. It is the third time that MP Lalonde has tried to introduce a Bill such as this.

Defining compassion

As the twin of a severely handicapped brother (he is much like Tracy Latimer was) and the son of a man who died of ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease), which Sue Rodriguez had, I find the prospect of legalized euthanasia and assisted suicide downright frightening. Others in society might be surprised; wouldn't someone like me want his brother and dad to have the right to "die with dignity"?

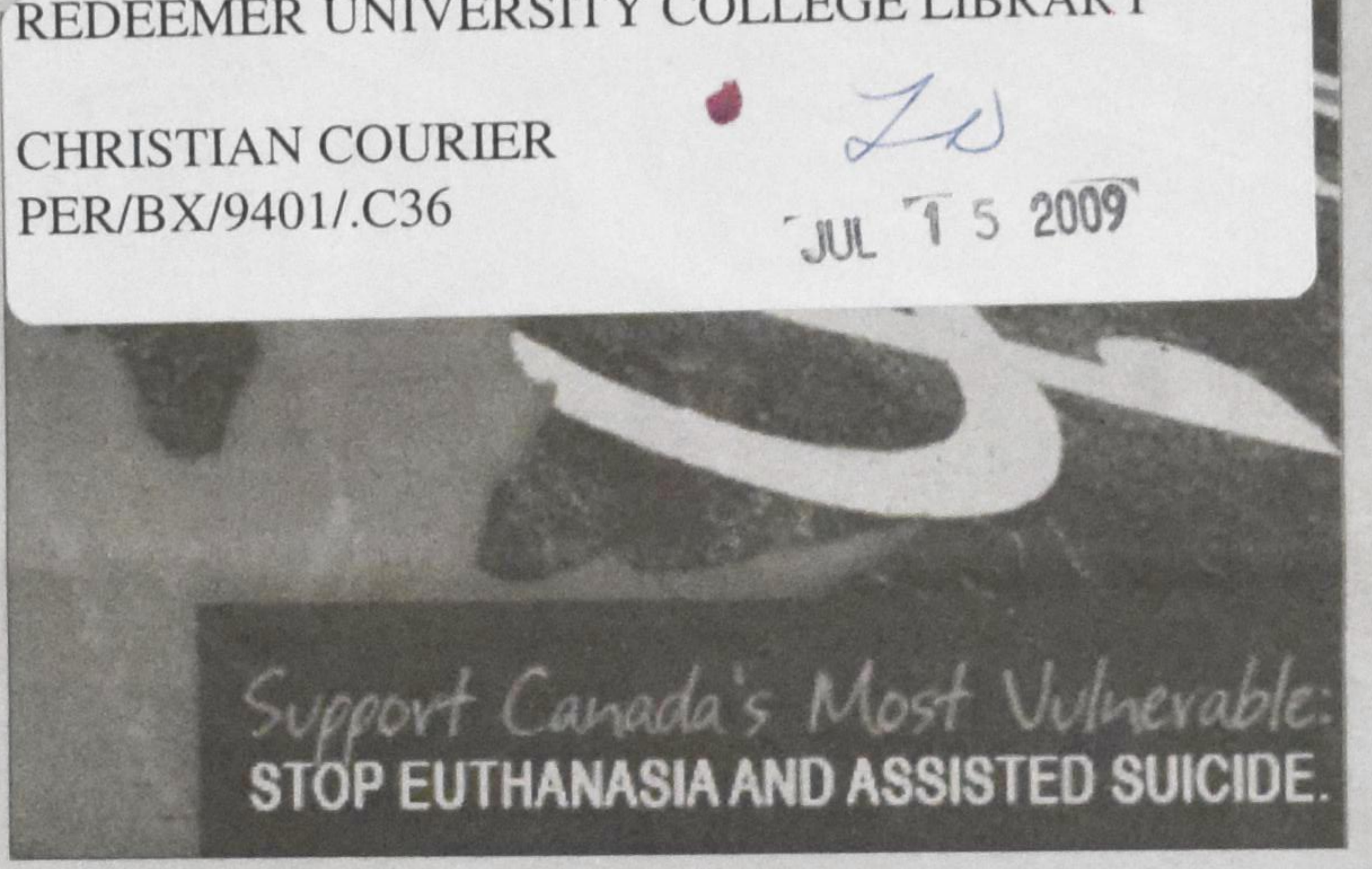
Ultimate compassion, however, for my brother isn't killing him. (He has too many needs to be able either to give consent to die or do it himself.) Ultimate compassion is what my mom and family does: sleep in the hospital with him overnight for days so that nurses who don't know him (they can't since he can't talk) can have someone there to speak for him. So that my brother hears a familiar voice and is comforted that someone who loves him is there with him, even if he can't understand that reality completely.

I'm passionately against euthanasia because, as a Christian, I know all life to be sacred, and I have learned about grace and peace through my brother.

Similarly, in the act of living with death, God used my father to teach me things I couldn't learn otherwise. As a Christian, death is the last great bastion of sin, which Christ has already converted into a passageway to life. And, since Christ is Lord of my life, to be Lord of it all he must also be Lord of the matter and time of my death.

The imperative to speak

In the realm of public policy, however, declaring Jesus' Lordship in the debate over euthanasia would make its proponents retort that we are exactly the reason a bill like this is needed. The right to die belongs to the individual, we're told, not the state, and certainly not to some private concept of a Higher Power. Most of our MPs aren't Christians, and they're the ones debating this bill. Even Christian MPs are told to check their faith at the door of the House of Commons, because a "private faith has nothing to do with public policy."



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This situation makes it vital that as Christians we bring God into discussions with our friends and neighbours, and even our MPs. The issue at hand through this bill is not primarily whether or not it will be legal to kill someone who is suffering. The issue is whether or not we as a society will have to accept that forced death is the way to solve suffering and – even

See **Euthanasia** *on page 2*

Gauging the price of justice:

Canada convicts its first War Criminal

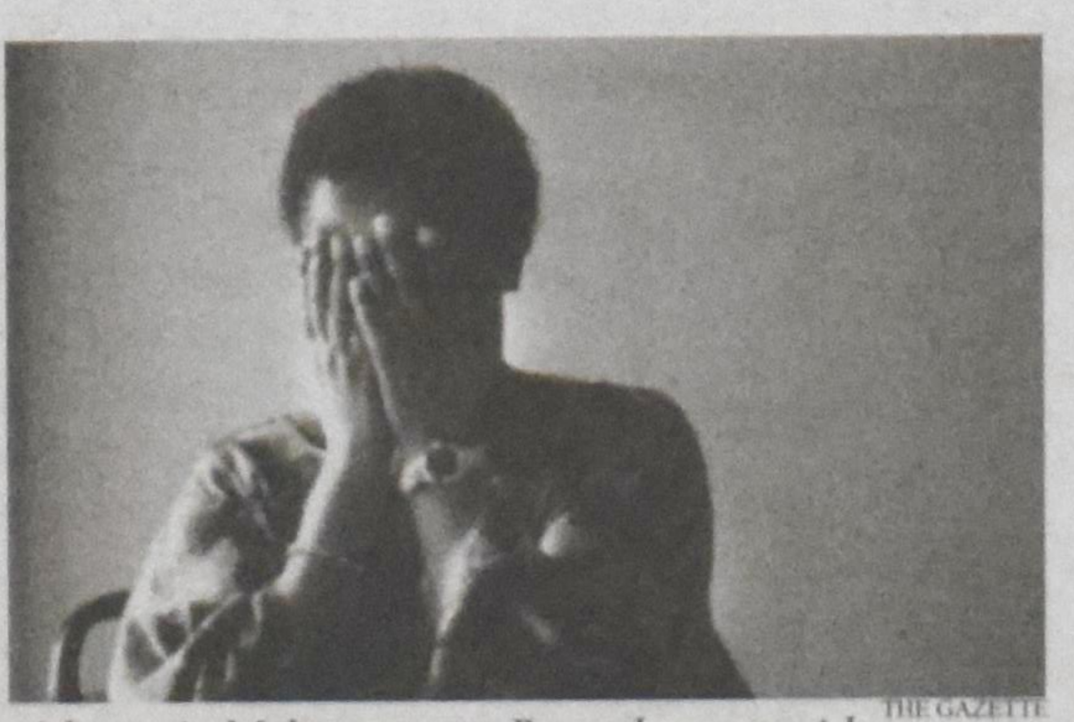
Brendan Kooy

MONTREAL– Désiré Munyaneza was the son of a wealthy Hutu businessman in the Butare region of Rwanda. During the 1994 ethnic genocide he was one of the on-the-ground leaders, helping to systematically and brutally eliminate millions of Rwanda's Tutsi population. Murder, rape and torture were all carried out on his orders.

On May 22, 2009, Mr. Munyaneza was finally brought to justice. He did not, however, face the courts in Rwanda. He heard his guilty verdict proclaimed in a Montreal courthouse.

This proved a watershed moment for Canada's justice system, as Munyaneza's conviction is the first under the Canadian War Crimes Act, established in 2000 which allows residents to be tried for crimes committed abroad. It is a trial that spanned almost four years, heard testimony from witnesses – often under the cloak of anonymity – in several countries, cost Canadian taxpayers somewhere in the range of $4 million, and went so far in depth that Justice Andre Denis racked up 16,000 pages of stenographic notes documenting witness testimony.

All to convict one man.



THE GAZETTE

Athanasie Mukarwego, a Rwandan genocide survivor, immigrated to Canada last year.

Unforseen consequences?

Prime Minister Stephen Harper made the recent announcement that under the State Immunity Act, Canada will allow victims of terrorism to sue the perpetrators. It obviously remains to be seen whether this will generate the monumental implications, cost and international significance that the War Crimes Act has now done, but it is a bold move either way. This bill not only serves the intended purpose of exposing perpetrators and sponsors of terrorism to legal action, but also includes foreign states.

With such an ethnically diverse population, one wonders whether Mr. Harper has considered the ramifications of this Act. Groups and individuals such as the Sri Lankan Tamil Tigers, Omar Khadr and Maher Arar most notably come to mind as those who might be

See **Justice** *on page 2*

News

Euthanasia *continued from page 1*

more crucially – whether we will buy into the idea that those suffering are only worthy of death, not continued life. Is death more compassionate than hospice care? It really is an "either/or" question.

As abortion has devalued life at its beginning, euthanasia will rob life's end of any meaning besides the fleeting feeling of autonomy and self-control. In fact, once society allows such autonomy, we will have crossed the great divide. From that point onward, death will be a weighty option and life less tenable for the terminally ill.

Adrian Miedema makes his brother Brian smile widely.

Grim decisions

Consider this simple illustration: you are diagnosed with terminal cancer and given six months to live. When the doctor gives you the diagnosis, the choice is no longer to fight for life or to allow death to come naturally. No, what the doctor offers is this choice: you can start chemo and radiation treatments that might give you another three months, or take these pills, which will put you to sleep and kill you whenever you decide.

That kind of false autonomy for the individual comes at monstrous price for individuals and society. Let me clarify that diagnostic "choice:" either rounds of chemo and radiation, which will cost tens of thousands of dollars and will occupy a hospital bed, or a toxic cocktail that costs a fraction of that and clears your bed.

If you choose chemo, will you (in your mind, if not actually to the doctors) have to justify your choice everyday? When the option of those pills is there, how will it feel to cost thousands of dollars for a few months more? It's a terrible scenario. And it's really not a choice. Choosing *not* to die sooner will be neither quick nor easy, let alone cost effective.

Equally tragic is a family that agrees to gather around as their father takes the toxins and dies. This family is – consciously or subconsciously – sending the same message. "Dad, your suffering is too much for us, so we agree with you that it'd be better if you died early."

What I desire, and this I'm sure is in the heart of God, is to be part of a family, health care system and society which treat the smouldering wicks and bruised reeds as Jesus does. Euthanasia, assisted suicide and Bill C-384 would all move us radically in the opposite direction.

Derek Miedema lives with his newlywed wife in Smiths Falls, Ontario and works in Ottawa as a social policy researcher. His twin brother Brian is and always has been a wonderful blessing to his family.

Justice *continued from page 1*

able to exploit such legislation to create very difficult diplomatic situations between Canada and her allies.

Moreover, any trial that goes the distance under the State Immunity Act is sure to end up in Munyaneza-like costs and logistics, paid for by Canadian taxpayers.

It is trials and laws like this that justifiably cause some Canadians to scratch their heads. What is Canada's role and responsibility in promoting and upholding global justice? What should the contribution be, if any, of a Canadian citizen in rural Saskatchewan to helping convict a former Rwandan who, while he probably did ghastly things in his homeland 15 years ago, poses little threat to Canadians today?

In a postmodern culture that has become obsessed with the individual's rights, people can now file lawsuits if their coffee is too hot. Will the afore-mentioned legislation set a further rights-based precedent where victims of terror can go tooth and nail after alleged perpetrators? Perhaps Harper's new Act will open up a Pandora's Box of lawsuits, finger-pointing and hot-air diplomacy.

Some Canadians will criticize this legislation on a different front. With the case of

THE GAZETTE

Rwandan journalism student Eugene Kwibuka came to Montreal to cover part of Désiré Munyaneza's trial for media back home.

the "Toronto 18" – the plot that convicted 18 Al Qaeda-influenced Torontonians of attempting to destroy the CN Tower – still fresh in the minds of many Canadians, some will question the effectiveness of the Canadian justice system. Today, eight of those 18 convicted have been either released or granted probation, including one of the alleged ringleaders. If Canadian justice cannot deal a harsher blow to individuals like these, should it bother spending millions on the trials of those who committed crimes that have minimal impact on Canadian soil?

Historical precedent

The truth is that Canadians have often looked beyond our own borders. In the past hundred years, Canadian troops have fought against imperialism, fascism, communism, and ethnic genocide in many countries across the globe. Canada has admirably served as one of the top troop-contributing nations for United Nations international peacekeeping missions. Currently, Canada is involved on land in the Afghanistan conflict to combat extremism, provide basic human rights to Afghan citizens and root out terrorism in Southern Asia. On the high seas, Canadian naval forces continue to help capture unlawful Somali pirates and ensure safe and fair passage for international shipping lines through the Gulf of Aden.

Some Canadians, however, remain sceptical about the value of international intervention. Canadian troops are regularly putting their lives in harm's way, often fighting against foes with no moral grounding, no regard for human life, and certainly no concept of 'just war.' What does Canada gain through these conflicts?

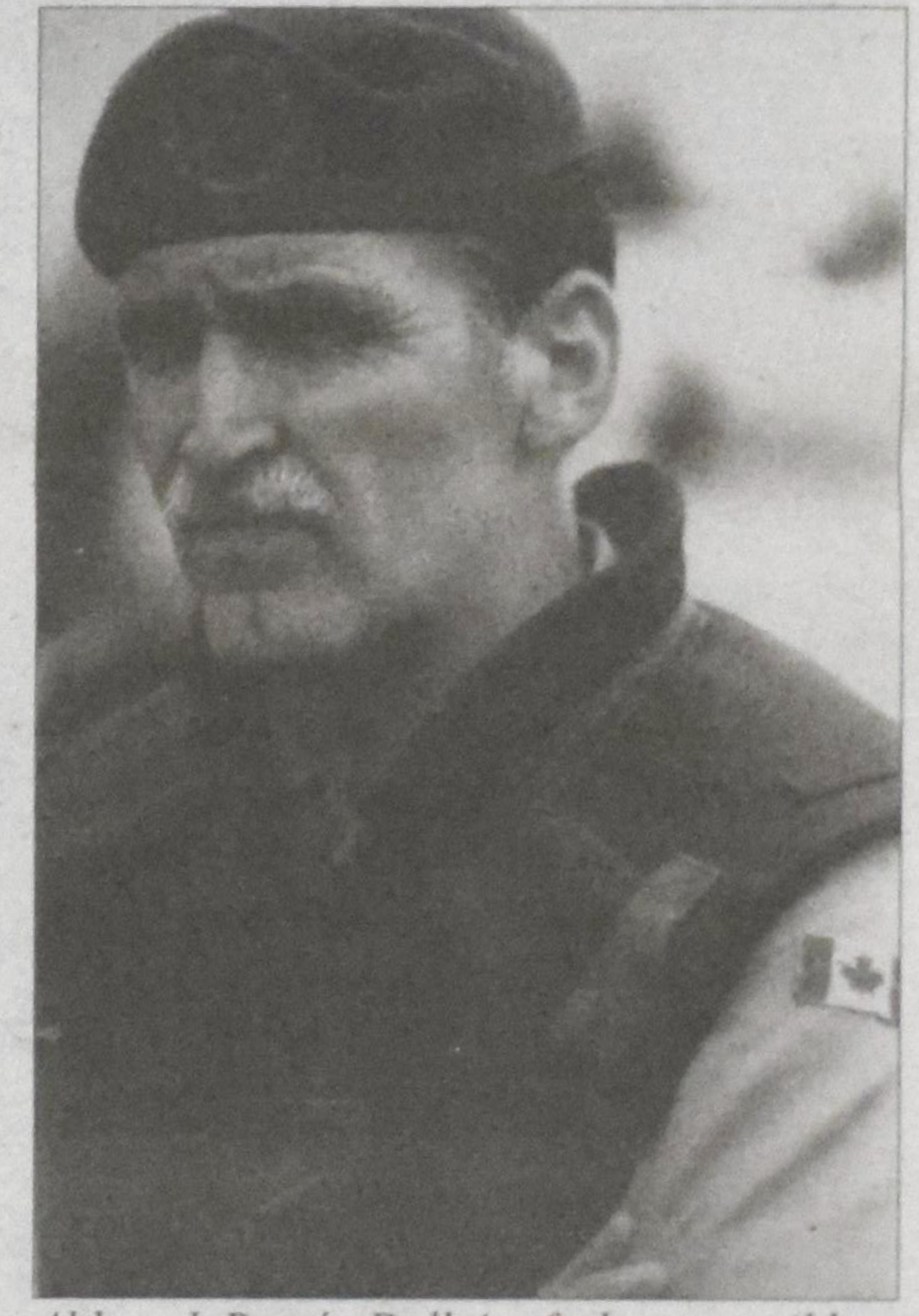
It's not easy to answer that question. Canadian citizens do not benefit *per se* from Afghan girls being able to attend school. Canadians do not profit from ships being able to travel safely around the African continent, save for the occasional ship that may unload its goods here. And Canadians will not gain anything concrete from convicting Mr. Munyaneza, the former genocidaire, and locking him away in a Quebecois prison.

If we fall into the trap of asking whether the end justifies the means, however, we turn our backs on a history rich with a tradition of vigorous defense of human rights and peace. Even worse, we further reduce the individualistic blinders of our society and forsake the concepts of common good, global harmony and justice for all.

Justice can be a fickle thing. Sometimes it is swift, other times it is mild; sometimes it is served, other times it is not; sometimes those who think they are doing justice must be called to account themselves. The question of 'what is just' has divided people and sparked conflict all throughout history. Yet it is a question that we as individuals, groups and nations are bound to continue to grapple with and decipher, and to base our actions and reactions accordingly to its answer.

Canada's justice system is certainly not infallible, as those who would question the necessity of spending $4 million of taxpayer money on a trial to convict an international war criminal, or debate the merit in international intervention or peacekeeping, would agree.

Similarly, anyone who has read Romeo Dallaire's acclaimed book, *Shake Hands with the Devil*, knows that Canada and other major Western democratic nations don't always get it right when it comes to justice. And the price



Although Roméo Dallaire feels responsible for the failed UN intervention in Rwanda, he's seen as such a hero there that parents have named newborns after him. He testified at the Munyaneza trial in 2007.

of the West's mistake, in the 1994 Rwandan genocide that Dallaire describes, was the lives of approximately two million innocent Rwandans.

One cannot expect any nation, including Canada, to always get it right. However, so long as Canada continues to commit to trying to uphold the rights of the one and the many, both inside and outside of its own borders, it serves the mandate of pursuing what is just and right. It may not always be a perfect carriage of justice that defines us; instead, it is a dogged pursuit.

Brendan Kooy is an Ontario representative for the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC). He currently resides in Chatham, Ontario.

News/Politics

Redeemer wins $2.9 million federal grant

Angela Reitsma Bick

ANCASTER, Ontario – On May 29, a few weeks after exams had been written, marked and recorded, a small group gathered in Redeemer's main foyer to hear local MP David Sweet. He announced that the Conservative government has awarded Redeemer a $2.9 million investment as part of a Knowledge Infrastructure Program (KIP). "I'm very encouraged," MP Sweet said, "that the federal government is investing in the outstanding work being done here."

Over two billion dollars will be distributed to universities across Canada as part of KIP, including nearby McMaster University. For Redeemer to be included in this list, however, is very significant. Redeemer's President Dr. Justin Cooper says, "This is the largest single grant in Redeemer's history, and marks the first time we have received capital funding from the federal government."

New labs, solar panels and phones

The grant represents half of Redeemer's $5.9 million Academic Complex Renewal Project, which began recently. Cooper says that the infusion of federal money will only "ramp up the renovation plans we already had." The project focuses primarily on expanding the research capabilities of Redeemer by renovating three labs and creating three more, as well as adding an on-campus weather station and greenhouse. Other parts of the project include energy-saving components such as solar panels. Improving campus security is also a consideration, with some funds being directed to the installation of emergency phones across campus – a safety feature that many other universities already have.

In the past, Redeemer students have received tuition assistance from the government and faculty members have won grants from a number of research councils at the federal level, but this is the first time the school itself has benefited from either provincial or federal capital funding programs. Tim Wolfert, Redeemer's Director of Communications, believes this grant represents a "sea-change" in federal funding issues; he's confident that it will set a new precedent for the relationship between the Canadian government and Christian institutions.

KIP is part of the government's on-going economic stimulus, intended to create jobs in the community. "Many of these projects," Wolfert says, "are 'shovel-ready' and will begin promptly."

Justin Cooper and MP David Sweet shake hands after the announcement.

Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman

'No-hate' religion

Jack and Bella Green were the sort of neighbours that warmed your heart. They were a friendly Jewish couple in their eighties with much to share. Bella shared her well-seasoned pickles and Jack shared his well-seasoned opinions.

One thing he intimated to me on numerous occasions was his personal aspiration to start a new religion. As a Jew who owned a jewelry store he had experienced his share of harassment, and so he was very clear on the central doctrine of his new faith.

"It's a 'no-hate' religion," he would explain, leaning back in his favourite chair. "Yep. It would be a 'no-hate' religion. I'll tell you, Peter, if you cut open a man's stomach you can't tell what his race or religion is. Nope. All our stomachs are the same. We bleed the same, too."

I loved it when he said that. Maybe it was the irony of a Jew and a Christian, both inheritors of the divine "love command" having a conversation about starting a "no-hate religion."

Multi-gospel

It is always necessary, however, to keep re-forming our hearts, heads and hands towards that ideal. Too often we slip into the "become like us" command, where we expect others to assimilate to our ways. I've heard the phrase "If you ain't Dutch, you ain't much" too many times to ever believe that the sin of racism is history.

On our secular "multiversity" campuses, diversity discussions are aggressively pro-actively present, as they ought to be in such hives of difference and disagreement. Public education is training the next generation to be highly sensitive towards all diversity issues. At times this degrades into diversity legalism, and "tolerance" talk can be an inadequate, if not superior-sounding sort of indifference towards our neighbour. But they are conscientiously working towards the bureaucratic form of hospitality that a human rights culture makes possible.

The church of Jesus Christ has, in my opinion, much richer and more deeply human resources at its disposal which it can offer to the broader public. Salvation history begins with the Abrahamic promise to be a blessing to all nations. Pentecost, the birthday of the church, begins with an "all nations" linguistic conference. And the new earth, according to John's vision, will be a place "with a great multitude that no one [can] count, from every nation, tribe, people and language." (7:9) Diversity is a "kingdom value."

Belhar for a new day

As I write, the CRCNA Synod is voting on whether or not to take the next three years to consider adding the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession of the church – in addition to the staples of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt.

The Belhar Confession arose as a Reformed Christian response to apartheid in South Africa and it champions the gospel of Jesus Christ as a gospel that seeks reconciliation where there is enmity, and seeks justice where there is poverty and oppression.

It is prefaced with this humble recognition: "We are only too well aware that this confession calls for the dismantling of structures of thought, of church, and of society which have developed over many years." If 11 o'clock Sunday morning is still the most racially segregated hour of the week, this is no easy task. It brings whole new meaning to the idea of a "confession" of the church.

Consider this: after 2000 years of the Bible and 500 years of our three confessions, we are not finished growing and confessing. As it stands, our current confessions do not address the issues of poverty and racism. As catechetical tools of the 16th century, their aim was to explain the doctrinal disagreements between Reformed, Roman Catholic, and Anabaptist teachings. This new confession puts an emphasis on God's mission to the world, and (in my opinion) it applies not only to diversity, but also to issues like abortion, war, and even conflicts in the church.

The Reformed Church in America has already begun the process of embracing this confession. It breathes of a fresh, living, international Christian tradition. I hope our leaders choose to do the same. Not only because it rings a timely bell for our young people, but because it is a significant stanza in our gospel song. We proclaim and desire to practice a "no-hate" religion.

Peter Schuurman lives in Guelph, Ontario where he parents his two children, Joseph and Petra. He is also part-time faculty at Redeemer University College where he teaches World Religion.

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Editorials

Sense of significance

Henry Baron

Even after five years, I still see that anxious face reappearing in my mind.

She was perhaps sixteen or so, pretty, neatly dressed in anticipation of the visitors.

She stood among the nearly destitute villagers in a sun-baked area of the Turkana region in northwest Kenya. Their little village had been attacked recently by a marauding tribe which had stolen the little there was while torching some of the homes.

I spoke to that young lady. In surprisingly good English she told me of her quest for an education. But she was trapped. There was no money for an education; there was barely enough food to survive.

We left those villagers in that place of unremitting heat on the blasted plains of Turkana with heavy hearts. The memory of the contrast between us is painful still. And I keep wondering what happened to the girl yearning for a greater sense of significance.

Maybe we all know something of that yearning. I remember it as an immigrant kid. Many years later it led me to title a talk in Friesland, at a symposium on the immigration experience, "The Quest to Belong." For I've taught literature long enough to discover that one of a person's primary emotional needs is a sense of belonging. That need seems to be especially intense during one's adolescent years, though it never leaves us entirely. I told the audience in Friesland how painful it was when on my first day at school in the new country my "quest to belong" was torpedoed when the lower-grade kids let me know unmercifully that I was wearing the wrong clothes. My sense of significance took a pretty deep nosedive that day.

Futile striving?

Reinhold Niebuhr saw it rightly when he said that we are creatures with a quest but with a foil for every quest, echoing Plato's observation that we are in constant wishing and never being satisfied. There may be something to that, for we are always in pursuit of significance, while always subject to possible or imminent threats to that significance. Schopenhauer contended that we spend our whole life in striving after something we think will make us happy, and when we do it is only to be disappointed; that we are mostly shipwrecked in the end and come into harbor with masts and rigging gone. Maybe Susan Boyle could speak to that.

And literature is, of course, rife with that theme. Think of *Moby Dick*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, *Macbeth*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Glass Menagerie*, *Catcher in the Rye*, *Stone Angel*, or the more contemporary *The Stone Diaries*, *Kite Runner*, and *Home*. Or think of the world around us. We see people and nations in pursuit of dignity, wellbeing, honourable labour, security, freedom, justice, equality. But, as Thomas Huxley observed more than a century ago, too often their struggle, and our struggle, too, with varying fortunes, is attended by infinite wickedness, bloodshed, and misery through the greed, lust, or ambition of our fellow human beings. We know about Rwanda, Darfur, Iraq, the Congo, Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka, and, closer to home, the collapse of Wall Street and the enigma of a Bernie Madoff. Or even closer to home, we can witness the cruelty of a school bully, the church leader as a predator, the parent as a child abuser. As Northrop Frye put it, it's the world we don't like and want to get away from.

What defines significance?

And so we tenaciously continue to pursue our quest, for it's significance that we are after. We seem to have been created with a need for it. The Serpent in the Garden knew that and made his demonic appeal. Later the Lord's disciples quarreled among themselves as to who would be Number One in the Kingdom. What matters to many students more than their GPA is their success as an athlete or as a social star. What matters to many adults more than the quality of their moral fiber is the quantity of their possessions. What matters to many in their workplace more than the satisfaction of doing good work is the size of their monthly paycheck. For our sense of significance is often defined by the culture surrounding us, or the peer group to which we connect, or the fallen part of our nature.

But as Christians, our significance is defined by our faith. We confess that we belong, first and foremost, to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ, the beginning and ending of our true significance. If that is true, then, as did Henri Nouwen, we need to ask ourselves as parent, teacher, church member, police officer, politician, world citizen: how can my pursuit of significance best reflect my love, not for self, but for my God and neighbor? The forlorn face of the questing teenager in Turkana still haunts me. Since then I've become a more intentional and generous contributor to CRWRC. For she, too, is my neighbour.

Henry Baron (baro@calvin.edu) is a retired professor of English at Calvin College.

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Canada

The wisdom of the Egyptians

Bert Witvoet

We were gathered for morning devotions in the backyard of Dr. Sifora's house in Pretoria, South Africa. There were nine of us, eight guests from the Louis Trichardt area in Limpopo and our hostess, Dr. Sifora Masia. Rev. Norman Ligege led us in a brief consideration of two texts having to do with wisdom. The first text was Acts 7:22, where we read: "Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action." The next text was 1 Kings 4:29, 30, where we read: "God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt."

The thread that bound the two passages together was the reference to "the wisdom of the Egyptians." In the ancient world the Egyptians were renowned for their wisdom. They were the first to put in writing their philosophies, wisdom sayings, laws and poetry. Because of the dry climate many of their papyrus documents have survived until modern times.

Wisdom to lead

In our discussion we noted that Moses was well prepared by God to lead the people of Israel when he was left as a baby to be brought up in the court of the Pharaoh. He must have enjoyed a good education in the wisdom literature of Egypt. But lest Moses became totally enamoured with the pagan worldview of the Egyptians, he was forced to flee and spend 20 years with Jethro's family in Midian. Solomon, too, was able to be a great leader because of a wisdom that was even greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. Again, the Bible acknowledges Egypt's reputation for wisdom and uses that as a standard by which to measure Solomon's wisdom.

"Why was Solomon's wisdom greater than that of the Egyptians?" we asked. Was it because God had given him a very generous quota of wisdom for a special dispensation – a time when Israel was entering its brief golden age? "Was Solomon wiser than Moses?" someone wondered. "Not necessarily," another one replied. "Moses's education in wisdom continued for many years after he fled Egypt. Maybe he, too, ended up having wisdom that exceeded that of the Egyptians." We concluded that each leader got wisdom according to the measure needed for his task.

You must know that when we were discussing this topic in that backyard in Pretoria, we had the day before met together with other Reformed Christians to refine our plans for the establishment of a Christian university, namely, TUCSA, which stands for Tree of Life University for Christian Studies in Africa. The hope is that TUCSA can be open to students in the northern province of Limpopo in the year 2010. The meeting had been somewhat uninspiring as organizational meetings that deal with logistics have a tendency to be. So we decided that early the following morning we, eight constituents from Limpopo and our host, should meet and spend time with the Lord and his Word.

Inspired choice

The fact that Rev. Ligege had chosen the two afore-mentioned two texts to focus our attention on the wisdom of the Egyptians was fortuitous. A Christian university, indeed, any Christian institute of learning at whatever level, needs to focus on wisdom as its central task. If the Lord laid the foundations of the earth by wisdom, as Proverbs 3:19 has it, then certainly those who want to study that earth need to see wisdom as the key to unlock the secrets of life. The Tree of Life University has a special obligation to live up to its name because Proverbs 3:18 says that wisdom "is a tree of life to those who embrace her." Educators are called to lead and rule, like Moses and Solomon, albeit in smaller more modest ways. And for that they need a good dose of wisdom. Wisdom enables them to discern what is good, what is just and what is right.

And so we caught the vision anew that morning. And we realized that we can learn from believers and unbelievers alike because all wisdom comes from God, that of the Egyptians as well as that of Moses and Solomon. But we also learned that the time comes that we must leave Egypt behind and be delivered from the oppression of serving false gods, and focus instead on the pure worship and service of God. That way we, too, can have wisdom that exceeds the wisdom of the Egyptians.

That morning the Tree of Life University became bigger than a wearisome organizational meeting and the appointment of a number of committees made up of fallible mortals. It became a visionary reality. Our sunrise study and prayers had turned into a palpable "God" moment. In holy awe we formed a circle afterwards and sang, "If you believe and I believe, and we together pray; the Holy Spirit must come down, and Africa will be saved."

Letters

An impossible 'Pipe dream'

In response to Syl Gerritsma's letter of April 27, to discourage gun ownership, I, too, would add my musings. Is the gun registry really effective in reducing gun violence as witnessed across our land? Are not the majority of casualties the result of handguns (which are supposedly outlawed)?

I personally have no use for any kind of firearm since I am neither farmer nor hunter. Do we really think that firearm registration will prevent the criminal element in our society form obtaining them illegally? I'm sure that all the fire power seized from the criminal sector in our society was never registered.

I believe that society would be better served if the violence portrayed on TV, the movies and videos were outlawed. It is via this media that gun violence is glamorized and advocated. May God give our leadership that wisdom to pursue that daring course of action.

John Rustenberg,
Whitby, Ont.

A Christian index

The Toronto Stock Exchange now publishes a Shariah Index which lists companies that comply with Islamic law. The Index excludes companies involved with alcohol, tobacco, entertainment, pork-related products, financial services, and high risk.

I am filled with admiration and wish for a similar, Christian Index. Do we even think Christianity should shape investment decisions? Muslims are putting us to shame. Their religion means something – it shapes how they live.

Each of us should take this to heart, but we also need a communal response. What shapes investment decisions for the pension funds of ministers, Christian school teachers, the Christian Labour Association?

Is God sending Muslims to wake up the children of Abraham Kuyper? In spite of the excellent work of Harry Houtman, do we see investments as avenues of Christian service? Would Jimmy Pattison's Mainland Publications be profitable if all Christians joined the Muslim in refusing to invest in pornography?

Nick Loenen
Richmond, B.C.

Books – more or less helpful

I have not read Hirsi Ali's book, but from other news articles and opinion pieces on and by her, I have found her quite shrill and ideologically very strongly small 'l' liberal. I agree we can learn from it, however.

I found Ian Buruma's book, *Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance* quite helpful. It, too, is written from a secular perspective, and overlooks the Christian communities' input on this question. But, nevertheless, it offers a helpful and careful perspective.

John Hiemstra
Edmonton, Alberta

The 'faulty' word processor

I use two word processors every day: one sits on my desk, the other is portable. Compared to the one on the desk, the portable one has a few problems. It has two fewer keys, no hard disk, and only one floppy disk. In addition, it does not have a print command anywhere. At times and in certain situations this causes problems.

Actually it is not so much the absence of the keys and the hard disk that cause the problem; it is the operator who does not know how to control that floppy disk. If he handles it properly, there is no need for the missing backspace or delete key. Once the words are out, there is no way of recalling them. The fact that you wish that there is a delete or backspace key indicates already that, sometimes, those words are inappropriate. Although they cannot be printed they do leave an imprint.

In case you have not guessed it yet, that portable word processor is standard equipment that comes with being born. If not handled carefully, it always has a tendency to cause problems. The only way that the damage can be somewhat undone is by apologizing and confessing that the words were inappropriate.

In the first century AD there was someone who wrote, (and I am only quoting the parts that have to do with the floppy disk) The tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts, and also, The tongue ... is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. Finally, No man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

In addition to the portable word processor, we have another piece of equipment; it is not so much a word processor as a thought processor. So what's the danger? Nobody knows what I am thinking. Well, that's not quite true either.

Job realized that God knew everything about him. He says, Does he not see my ways and count my every step? (Job 31: 4). So God knows whatever goes on in our thought processors.

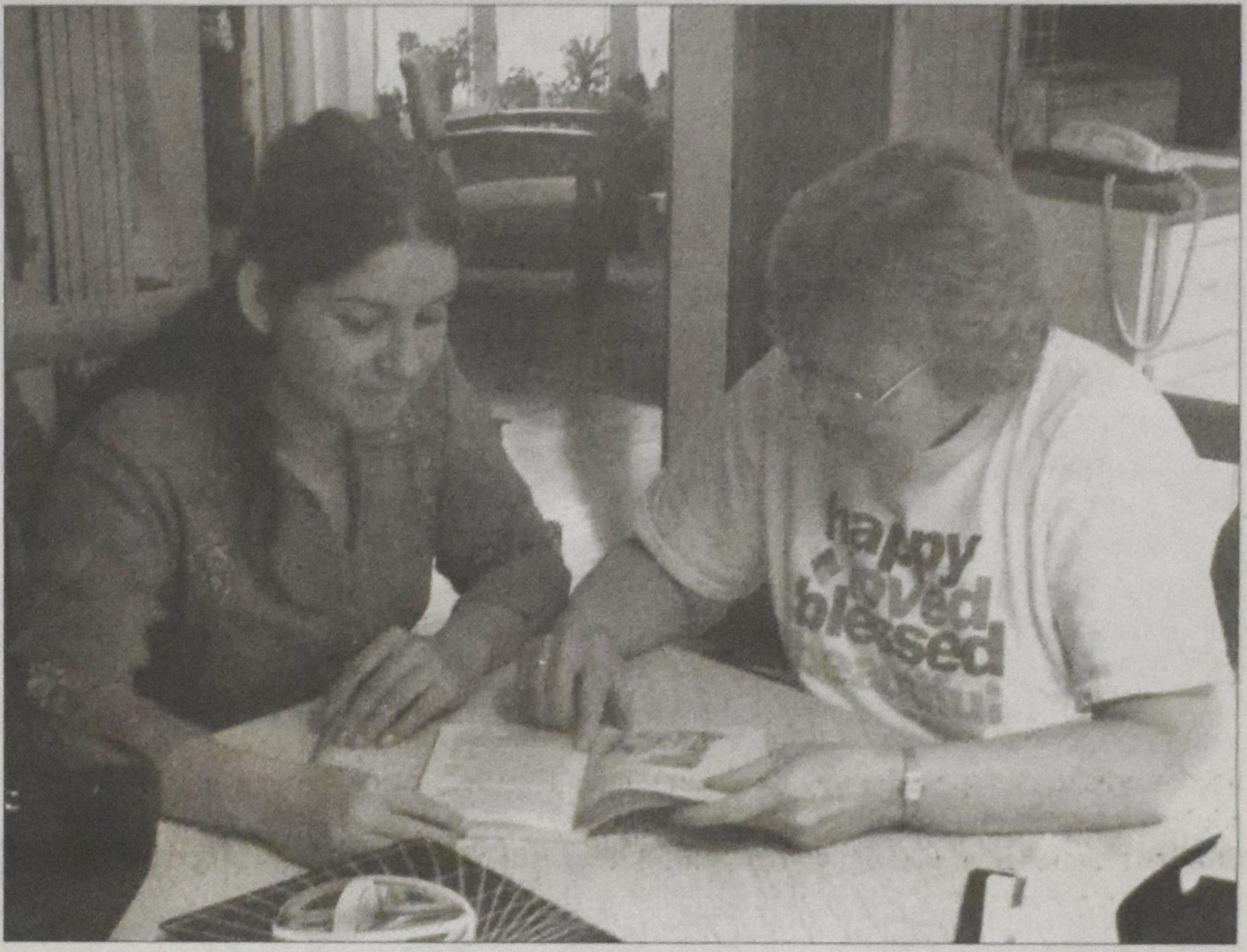
There is a delete key available for both types of processors. Unfortunately, you and I cannot access this key. That access is limited to God. He only operates this key when we come to him and confess our sins.

Lou DeVries
Abbotsford BC

Mutual enrichment

In the June 8 issue of CC we asked readers to respond to our question "What kind of contact, if any, do you have with your Muslim neighbour, co-worker or fellow student?" We received the following response so far. We remain open to further responses.

It has been almost 3½ years since I first met Roya, now age 28, her husband by an arranged marriage, age 50, and her sons, ages 8 and 1. Roya, a Muslim originally from Afghanistan, applied to be a student through North Halton Literacy. As a retired teacher, I applied to be a volunteer tutor. Unknown to Roya, I prayed that God would connect me to the "right" person. Roya, unknown to me, had asked her God, Allah, for the same. Now we both say, "God is good" for bringing us together.



We meet weekly for a few hours. She has learned much: she recently got 80 per cent in her grade 9 English correspondence course. I have learned much too – learned about her culture, religion, customs, and how she relates personally to Allah. What a blessing to have this family in our lives.

We are friends now. She asks us to pray for her, and can we cry together and laugh together. We have shared meals in our home and in theirs.

Our local church (Georgetown Christian Reformed Church) is sponsoring Roya's two younger sisters and nephew, who are UN refugees in Pakistan. We pray that they will soon pass their interview in Islamabad. They are all Muslims, with much trauma and sadness in their past. I pray that Jesus will make himself know to them as Saviour and Lord.

Corrie Bootsma
Georgetown, Ontario

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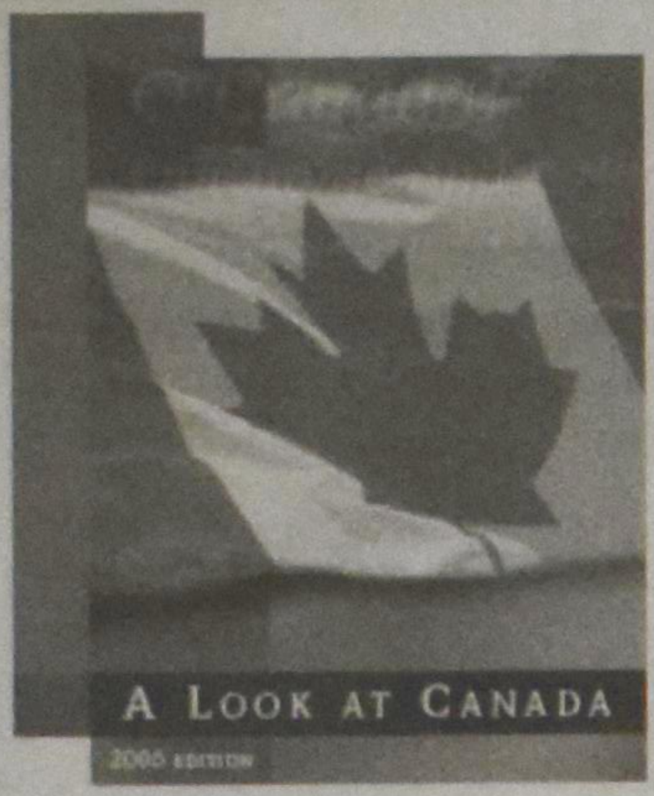


New citizenship guidebook announced:

Is multiculturalism under fire?

Harold Alkema

OTTAWA–Jason Kenney, the federal Immigration and Citizenship Minister, has ordered a re-write of the Canadian Citizenship Guidebook entitled "A look at Canada." Mr. Kenney notes that the move would update the current, twelve-year-old guide, add new descriptions of previously omitted military history and foster greater integration of immigrants into the mainstream of Canadian culture.

Not a melting pot

This type of rhetoric is somewhat surprising coming from a Canadian politician. Canadian culture has often been described as a mosaic, a rough amalgamation of the immigrant cultures that helped to build the country. Kenney claims that the government's new approach is not an attack on multiculturalism, the cornerstone of the Canadian mosaic. He asserts that many hours spent talking to recent immigrants convinced him that integration does not undermine tolerance. He hopes, however, for a greater focus "on the things that unite us, not divide us."

Around 100 new Canadians gathered in Toronto for a swearing-in ceremony last June.

Larger integration program

The re-writing of the citizenship test and guidebook is only one part of a re-vamping of the entire immigration process by the government. Recently, the Conservatives increased funding four-fold for language training in French and English. In spite of the money made available, however, only one quarter of immigrants make use of the classes. Kenney warns that the government could place serious restrictions on entry for immigrants lacking the required background in one of Canada's official languages, and encourages new citizens to make use of the further language training. The Immigration Act already calls for knowledge of English or French as a prerequisite for immigration; only minor children and parents of immigrants are exempted.

Other changes include "pre-integration" programs to be launched in China, India, and the Philippines. These are designed to recruit professionals, help them get Canadian recognition for their credentials and assist them in finding housing, health coverage, employment and schools for their children. Seen in this light, integration hardly seems intimidating.

Partisan politics

There may also be partisan political reasons for many of the changes that the Conservatives are proposing to the country's current government immigration literature. Kenney has called the old Liberal-penned guide "an insipid view of Canada." He also bemoaned the lack of references to Canada's military history, noting that the Battle of Vimy Ridge and the poppy are missing from the section on important Canadian motifs.

The minister further dismissed the current guide's emphasis on environmental sustainability as "advice on recycling." If the new guide is simply motivated by an anti-environmentalist, pro-military, Conservative agenda, then the whole effort seems a waste of taxpayers' dollars. Kenney is correct in suggesting, however, that the current guide is twelve years old and needs updating. For example, it calls Canada a peace-loving nation and notes our country's role in peacekeeping and diplomacy throughout the world. The mission in Afghanistan and other changes in international politics might necessitate a new view of the role that Canada takes in world affairs today.

Key omissions

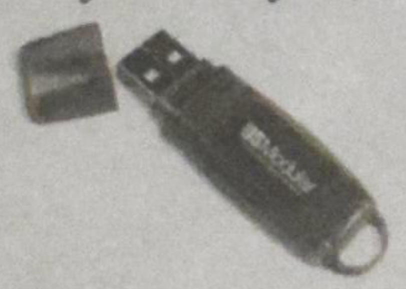
While certain portions of the present guidebook need to be re-drafted, it is interesting to note the omissions in both the Liberal and Conservative versions of the document. It seems that neither one side nor the other will mention religion or the diversity of faiths currently practiced in the country. While Kenney will backtrack more than 90 years to celebrate Vimy Ridge, he seems unwilling to mention Canada's more recent history as a largely Christian nation.

Continued on page 9

From the lab
Rudy Eikelboom

I lost my memory stick; do I need a cognitive enhancer?

Perhaps it would be better to say: I misplaced my flash drive (a little computer data storage device), and I am sure it will be in the last place I look. My memory is not as good as I remember it being, and finding things like my memory stick is occasionally an issue. I am not alone; we would all like to improve our memory to be better at retrieving some fact or person's name.



Although all of us experience some memory failures, for some individuals the progressive loss of memory is due to devastating diseases such as Alzheimer's. These diseases cause such loss of memory – and memories – that they threaten to rob a person of his or her individuality. Neuroscientists are developing drugs called cognitive enhancers that are targeted at improving memory and learning. To prevent, or even delay, the memory loss in Alzheimer's sufferers would prove a boon to millions of families. At this point, researchers are optimistic that treatments may someday be possible, but it will take more time and research. This is important research, and we all pray that scientists will be blessed by our Lord in their efforts to reduce the adverse effects of this crippling disease.

Human interference?

These drugs have also sparked an ethical debate: it has been discovered that they might help individuals who are not ill. Students learning new material in school, executives who must remember many facts, and "redundant" workers who need to re-skill might all benefit from drugs that enhance performance in memory and learning. There are some drugs, used to treat attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, that improve concentration, and a number of university students are taking them to help their studies (US figures suggest at least seven per cent; Canada is probably a bit behind and lower). What do we think about using such "cognitive enhancers" for individuals who are normal but want to do better? As Christians, what insights can we bring to this discussion?

Everyone agrees that before we even think about making such drugs available, they need to be safe and they need to work. For many of the drugs being evaluated, researchers are still unsure about both of these issues. Safety is important, but if you have a drug that counteracts the effects of Alzheimer's while potentially causing heart problems, you may still decide to use the drug. However, when the same drug is considered for use in healthy individuals simply to improve mental functioning, the risk-benefit ratio changes, and the safety of the drug (both short- and long-term) needs to be very high.

Too much of a good thing?

But do cognitive enhancing drugs work? This question may prove difficult to answer. Do you really want to remember for the rest of your life that your first-year biology textbook had a blue cover featuring a drawing of a blood cell? Certain facts are important but many are not; we want to remember the former but not the latter. Secondly, memories are complex, involving many connections, and a drug that works by improving memory for a simple list of words may not help in complicated real-world situations.

This question of a drug's effectiveness may be even more complicated: the drug may work for individuals only in less-than-ideal circumstances. That is, the drug may help a sleep-deprived person memorize facts to pass a psychology midterm, but it may not help a person who is well-rested, healthy, and thus already functioning at a peak level. We already use this type of help: I take vitamins because I do not always eat a fully balanced diet; I enjoy pizza and other "fast foods." If cognitive enhancers were helpful only in difficult situations, would that affect our willingness to make them available?

Is the way God made us, which he pronounced "very good," something that we should "improve," aside from treating illness? If our classmates do take cognitive enhancers and get better marks as a result, should we also take the drugs rather than risk poorer grades?

And what if the drugs can be shown to help in decision-making, for example, it reduces impulsive, half-baked responses and results in better choices? Is it possible that they could produce more wisdom? As Christians we need to think about these practical ethical questions, but right now I need to go and find my memory stick.

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca) is associate professor of psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario

Moments of ministry in chaplaincy

Isaiah 1: 18- 20

The Roman Catholic chaplain had come to hear confessions. They all knew what that visit meant. Although none of the officers had told them, they all knew that they were headed to the front again. A visit from the chaplain indicated the seriousness of the move. Their platoon had already lost a significant number of men due to casualties, and the other groups were similarly depleted. A sort of loaded expectation hung around the bivouac like mist on a sunless morning. The chaplain would be available for two hours in the afternoon. After lunch he set up a make-shift altar of empty ammo boxes in the field beside the last tent. On the boxes he placed a white linen table cloth that he had borrowed from the officer's mess. Then he waited.

After some time, one of the men appeared at the altar. He knelt down and spoke words that were inaudible for the others who stood or sat down at a distance. After a while a short queue formed in front of the altar. Not all the men in that queue were Roman Catholic, but they all had the profound human need for forgiveness. The chaplain did not ask about the men's religious affiliation, he simply administered the mercy of God. In his loving mercy, God hears the confession of anyone who repents, and there is joy in heaven when that happens.

Carl Tuyl

(ctuyl@rogers.com) *is a retired CRC minister linving in Toronto*

Flowers & Thistles

Curt Gesch

Pith is in

I was never much of a haiku-writer. Haiku seemed much ado about little to me. Until recently I couldn't understand much about Zen, either. In the past few years, however, I have had hundreds of e-mail conversations with Kelly Shepherd, a Canadian poet and former student of mine, who lives sometimes in Alberta and other times in Korea, when he is not visiting Vernon, B.C. or Malaysia.

Kelly keeps up a steady reminder that my observations about nature are sort of, well, Zen-ish. Recently, I read Peter Schuurman's appreciation of certain aspects of Zen in *Christian Courier*.

So, finding a section about haiku in a textbook about Japan, I decided to combine poetry study with observations about forests, weather, and nature. Ordinary things, you might say.

My poetry mentor, Kelly, alerted me to Jack Kerouac's definition of haiku. "'Western Haiku' simply [must] say a lot in three short lines in any Western language. Above all, a Haiku must be very simple and free of all poetic trickery and make a little picture."

I required my grade 5-6 students to write a haiku, a "Western haiku." The number of syllables could vary from the the strict 5-7-5 standard, but rhyme was proscribed under pain of dismemberment; adjectives, adverbs and articles discouraged, and direct didacticism denied admittance.

Here's what I got.

Derek Kronemeyer obviously watched *March of the Penguins* carefully. He captured perhaps the most moving scene in the movie in three short lines.

Penguin father
Standing alone in the cold
Until mother comes.

Jason Lieuwen proved an astute observer of seasonal phenomenon in central British Columbia.

Water flows and falls down
It becomes a creek and stream
Ocean wins the water

Fire crackles with pop
Trees fall at its frightful sight
Water splashes over flame

Sydney Kronemeyer was imaginatively involved in a novella we studied: *Island of the Blue Dolphins*.

blue streaks on glassy sea
glide through blue dunes of fallen sky
dolphins on the shore

Perhaps my favourite 2009 student haiku is Sydney's poem about a topic as exalted and humble as the dandelion.

gold as the bright sun
then silver as the full moon
dandelions grow

"Splendor in the ordinary" is a phrase coined by a famous Christian writer. If haiku is what Jason and Derek and Jason and Sydney and Kelly Shepherd and Jack Keroac say it is, then I refine my comment about haiku-inspired poetry: It is little ado about much.

Pith.

Curt Gesch is privileged to teach three days per week at Houston (B.C.) Christian School, where – besides teaching about birds and logging equipment – he spends recess and lunch hour teaching students how to strip willows to make walking sticks and canes.

Citizenship *continued from page 8*

There are other omissions as well. Neither party mentions Canada's contributions in science, arts, culture and literature; the likes and dislikes of Canadians; their favourite foods and beverages or their basic attitudes and approach to life. In short, there is no effort to show the "Canadian soul," if such a thing exists. Newcomers are left with no real idea of the kind of people they will meet when they arrive in this country.

Regional and language divisions

Likewise, Liberals and Con-servatives both want to deny that there are any real conflicts within Confederation. The current Liberal-writ version describes Canada's regions in some detail, but fails even to mention Quebec separatism. If Kenney has his way, English-French and provincial-federal rivalries may be downplayed further. The overall effect will be that new immigrants will have an idealistic and unreal view of Canada, which could leave many without a genuine knowledge of Canadian civic life.

The problem is that Mr. Kenney wants it both ways. He claims he wants to unite Canadians, but his solution is to ignore the issues that divide them. Moreover, Kenney seems to put the onus for change on newcomers. Most Canadians would recognize that this is simply unfair. Citizens born in this country and those who have held citizenship for a longer time obviously have a role to play towards unity, too.

There is no simple solution to the very real divisions that exist in Canada today. Similarly, there is no one way to describe Canadians. Mr. Kenny's proposed booklet on "how to be a good Canadian," however, does not seem likely to provide useful approaches on either issue.

Harold Alkema has a Master's Degree in History from the University of Waterloo. He currently works as a researcher in Ottawa with a private firm specializing mainly in Native Affairs issues and historical research.

News

After Sri Lankan war ends, mission work begins

Christian Blind Mission offers humanitarian aid

Sandy Hazell

Families have been ripped apart. Limbs have been amputated by land mines and shelling. Buildings have been flattened. Thousands of people are sick, severely injured, traumatized and hungry. There is no adequate housing, no proper sanitation facilities and a lack of clean water. There are an estimated 280,000 internally displaced people (IDP) in Sri Lanka, and a number of this magnitude is beyond the capacity of agencies currently working there.

"The three decade civil war in Sri Lanka may finally be over, but the Christian Blind Mission's humanitarian work has just begun," says Ed Epp, Executive Director of cbm Canada. "We are particularly concerned for displaced persons who have injuries that require urgent medical care."

100,000 civilians fled the war zone in the final days of conflict. Fifty percent are children, and almost one third of the population is either pregnant women or lactating mothers. More than 16,000 suffer wounds inflicted by land mines or shelling.

Valerie Scherrer, cbm's emergency coordinator, recently visited Sri Lanka to assess the current situation and support cbm partners in the country.

Supplies such as food and water are being passed out by the Christian Blind Mission

"cbm is concerned for all civilians in the affected area, particularly those with existing or new disabilities as a result of the conflict," says Scherrer. "Since January, unofficial UN estimates suggest that a total of 16,000 of those injured have sought medical help. This population is subject to a high risk of new disability because of a lack of proper facilities and the limited availability of essential medical services."

"cbm will continue working with its partners and other organizations to meet immediate life-saving needs," says Epp. "We then plan to proceed with mid and long-term strategies to address the ongoing needs of persons with disabilities." Because cbm has been in Sri Lanka for over 30 years, it is well situated to offer humanitarian aid. "I believe God has opened a small door for cbm to fill a life-saving gap before more relief can flow into Sri Lanka."

Tamil men and women who have lost their legs sit in a waiting area at the main hospital in the town of Vavuniya in northern Sri Lanka.

Expect the unexpected

Bert Hielema

The "Black Swan" phenomenon has become popular ever since Nassim Taleb introduced this concept in his book by that name. To quote him:

> "It illustrates a severe limitation to our learning from observation or experience and the fragility of our knowledge. One single observation can invalidate a general statement derived from millennia of confirmatory sightings of millions of white swans."

My goodness, why can't people write in plain language? Here's what the man means: One unusual and unexpected event can wipe out all our assumptions based on thousands of usual and expected events.

The Bible goes back a long way, and a few examples from it are not out of place. During the time before the Flood, when Noah built the Ark – they must have called him Nutty Noah behind his back – nobody expected to drown in the centre of Asia, but, things had gotten so bad that, in retrospect, we can now see that a new start was needed. So God pulled a Black Swan.

Good man Job never expected to lose everything he held dear, but, as the Bible shows, Job's misfortune was necessary to turn him from an ego-centered fellow to an eco-centered man. That Black Swan event still serves as an excellent example of God's mysterious ways to educate even us today.

Recent samples are the rise of Hitler, the Pearl Harbour bombing, the fall of the Soviet Union, and September 11.

Turkey surprise

Nassim Taleb gave a good illustration. "Until Thanksgiving the turkeys live well. Everyday, the food arrives. Everyday, they get bigger and fatter. Then, one day, just before the third Thursday in November, when Americans celebrate their traditional Thanksgiving dinner...with no warning, comes the knife...the crash...the collapse...the discontinuity...the 7 sigma event in the turkey's life that changes everything."

Look at our banking collapse: A real Black Swan, it changes everything.

Barton Biggs, in his book, *Wealth, War, and Wisdom*, also mentions the Black Swan. Although he still expresses his total commitment to "the wisdom of equity markets," "the intuitive astuteness of the investors," and "the perfect and dispassionate judgements of the stock exchanges," he ends his book on a note of caution. Says he: "expect the unexpected," prepare for a "Black Swan" event.

Writes this man who has spent his entire life on Wall Street, and is seen as THE authority there: "History often leaps forward in disorderly, chaotic jumps." He even quotes "The Four Horsemen" – those beasts of doom cited in Revelation 6, who "will ride again and the barbarians will be at the gate."

Dire prediction

He says that "by definition, the next Black Swan will be some form of total breakdown of civilized society and the social and financial infrastructure as we know it." The ongoing Money Melt-Down has the potential to deteriorate into such a disaster. No wonder the Pentagon is preparing 20,000 troops especially for such an eventuality.

Biggs cites one scenario: "The trigger event could be a power failure that lasted not a day but a month and would paralyze the economy."

This was before the money-meltdown whose consequences are still in its infancy. Says he, "Whatever happens, it most likely will be an event that is both unexpected and we will not be prepared for." This fits the present circumstances. Both former Secretary of the Treasury Alan Greenspan and the current one, Ben Bernanke, voiced their surprise in connection with the current crisis, caused by the enormous fall-out from their cheap money policies. Yes, a true Black Swan situation.

So here is what Barton Biggs recommends: "Another strategy should be to have a farm somewhere or a ranch far off the beaten track but which you can get to reasonably quickly and easily…. You should assume the possibility of a breakdown of the civilized infrastructure. Your safe haven must be self-sufficient and capable of growing some kind of food…. It is expensive to be early, but it is far better to be early than to be late."

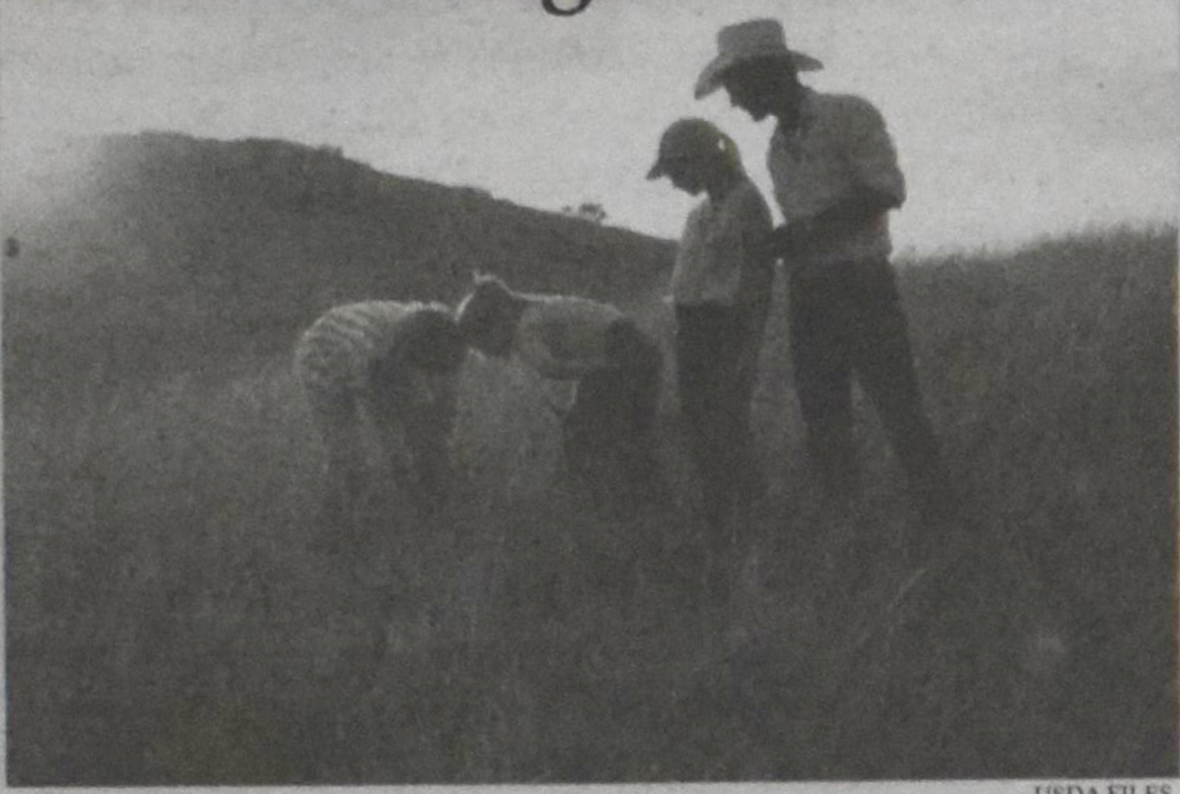
His advice to the wealthy applies to all of us.

The least anybody can do is to have sufficient food in place – canned, frozen, dry, milk powder, root crops, bottled water – for at least 4-6 weeks, together with some basic camping supplies for cooking, heating, sleeping.

We don't know when the next Black Swan will rear its elongated neck. Better be prepared.

This column can be seen on http://hielema.ca/blog/ and is regularly viewed in more than 25 countries, among them Russia and China.

Preserving a family heritage through the business ledger



USDA FILES

John Clement

Some people view a family farm in strictly economic terms. For them, it's how a family provides an income and carries few other values. For others, a family farm is also a particular piece of soil that anchors our place in the world and ties us to a continuity of previous family members. In essence, it's where we come from and is a major contributor to our sense of self.

I was raised with the latter view of the family farm.

From an agronomic point of view, the family farm I was raised on is nothing special. It was carved from the bush by my great-great-grandfather and has seen mixed farming, contract vegetables, tobacco, cash crops and beef production. It's an odd mix of glaciated soils, with everything from clay to blow sand. Mostly though, it's a nice sandy loam that grows most things well, but nothing outstanding.

From my family's point of view, however, the farm is a heritage that carries a host of non-economic values. First, it provided refuge from the trials and tribulations of the Ulster Plantation in Northern Ireland. It moved on to become a home base for some who went and fought foreign wars and returned as victors. And it was also a special launching point for several descendents who sought their fortune elsewhere, moving on to towns and cities in other parts of the country. It has served as a stable connection throughout time that transcends our changing days and which gives a sense of place and belonging.

Balancing act

As I've matured, I've developed a viewpoint that places more value in the family and less in the farm. But I still strongly understand the special connection between families and property that make family farms so tenacious. Many families, particularly those with several generations invested, will fight on when the competitive economy puts a stranglehold on the viability of a farming business. And they do so because of the personal stewardship they exercise in maintaining the family heritage in a piece of property.

Through all my pondering on this subject, I've come to the conclusion that if you want to preserve a family farm for its non-economic values, you need to strongly pay attention to the business ledger. Without investing yourself in top-notch business skills, you undercut the platform you place under the other values you hold dear. If a family farm defines your place in the world, you have to find a way to make it pay the freight. It's the most viable way to maintain both a business and a family heritage.

John Clement is the General Manager of the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario. CFFO is supported by 4,353 family farmers across Ontario.

The exemplary journey of a Dutch-Canadian pastor and his wife

A book review by Bert Witvoet

Many of us will remember the Rev. Dr. Louis Praamsma, a much loved and respected pastor in the Christian Reformed Church, church historian and author, who passed away in 1984. His daughter Johanna Van Belle-Praamsma, has written a historical novel about Louis and his wife, Nellie, entitled *Coram Deo: Before the Face of God*. The book is called fiction mostly so that the author can imagine conversations that took place long ago or not in her presence, but the narration of persons, place and events is strictly historical and biographical.

Although the story is about both parents, the centre of gravity is Louis Praamsma and his career, as well as his thoughts on church developments in the Netherlands and Canada. Louis was considered a "conservative" theologian by those who considered themselves more progressive thinkers, especially in the Netherlands, but also in Canada. He was against Reformed churches joining the World Council of Churches. He firmly believed in absolute truth, in the infallibility of the Word of God, and the faithful guidance of the historic creeds. He wrote about the creeds in *De Belijdenis in de Crisis* (*The Confessions in Crisis*) and he wrote a book about teaching the Heidelberg Catechism. He lamented the lack of unity among Reformed Churches, and wrote *Het Dwaze Gods* (*The Foolishness of God)* in response to the church split in the Netherlands of 1944. Whether people agreed with him or not, he was generally considered a man of great integrity.

Of course, the author pays tribute to her mother as well. By all accounts, Louis and Nellie were a loving couple, and always consulted each other. As such, Nellie was deeply involved in the choices of career and positions. As mother, Nellie often took on the role of disciplinarian and encourager in the household, partly because Louis was immersed in his busy church work or engaged in writing a book or attending a conference, sometimes in other parts of the world.

Faith integrity

Not that Louis neglected his children. He was a great story teller and his family benefited from that, as well as the mentally disabled children he ministered to in the Netherlands. Son Riemer recalled the time that Louis told stories in the basement of the parsonage during World War II while war planes with live bombs flew overhead. He also wrote about his dad's writings, "You never doubted that he himself stood for every word he wrote. He drew the lines from the early church and from the time of the Reformation to our present day and could, therefore, expose many a modern novelty or fad as a rather old fashioned heresy and admonished us to remain true to our Christian and Reformed principles."

The faithfulness that both Nellie and Louis displayed toward their Lord and to the gospel is hinted at in the title of the book. They lived Coram Deo, conscious of the fact that whatever they did or experienced was done before the face of God. In that way they echoed Psalm 139:7, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there…." Since Psalm 25 was also a favourite passage, the family selected it for a funeral text. "Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your path; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are my God, my Saviour, and my hope is in You all day long." Louis who always was a great teacher, wanted to be taught himself first of all.

Personal stuff

Coram Deo is not first of all a biography of a scholar and leader in the Christian Reformed Church. There is too much focus on family concerns for that. In fact, there are times that the book sounds more like a memoir meant for the Praamsma family then a historical account intended for the general public. The detailed descriptions of the various parsonages the family inhabited and the details about uncles and aunts in Holland reveal the author's desire to keep the past alive for several generations of Praamsmas.

Louis biked everywhere billowing smoke.

Not that it bothered me, the reviewer. I happen to know several members of the Praamsma family quite well, and I have had supper at Louis and Nellie's table years ago. There is, in fact, a very interesting connection between myself and the Praamsma family. The author's grandfather, Riemer Praamsma, was born in my hometown, Joure. He was a classmate of my grandfather, Lolle Dijkstra, who was three months older than Riemer. The two even went on to high school together (not a common thing to do for ordinary folk in small-town Friesland), and were, thus, quite well acquainted with each other.

Apart from that, reading about life in the parsonage, the way a minister receives a call and responds to it, the family vacations on the island of Schiermonnikoog, and the joys and sorrows of normal family life brings the author's story close to anyone's heart and mind. Johanna Van Belle-Praamsma has done the Christian Reformed community in Canada and beyond a great service by faithfully setting down "the journey of the Rev. Dr. Louis Praamsma and his wife. Nellie, from their place of birth in the Netherlands to their graves in Canada."

Johanna Van Belle-Praamsma, M.D. *Coram Deo: Before the Face of God*. The United States of America: www.xulonpress.com. 2009. 276 pp.

The book can be ordered through your local bookstore, or through Amazon.com or Barnes & Noble.

British Christians penalized for faith

LONDON (TCI) – Thousands of Christians in Britain are losing out on promotions and being hassled at work because of their beliefs, according to a new poll. More than half of the Christians surveyed on behalf of *The Sunday Telegraph* said they had suffered some form of persecution for being a Christian.

The ComRes poll found that three quarters of Christians say there is less religious freedom in the UK now than 20 years ago. Five per cent said their beliefs had got in the way of a promotion and ten per cent said family members had rejected them because of their faith. ComRes surveyed 512 Christians at the end of April, selected through both "mainstream" and evangelical media.

The poll came after successive cases in recent months in which Christians have faced problems at work because of their beliefs. Earlier this year Christian nurse Caroline Petrie was suspended after offering to pray for a patient. She has now been reinstated. Last month another nurse was sacked for suggesting during a training course that going to church could help a patient suffering with stress. And a Christian foster care worker had her qualifications removed because she allowed a Muslim child in her care to convert to Christianity (*see Feb. 23 CC*).

In addition, a Christian teacher, charity worker, council worker, school receptionist and government registrar have each faced unemployment for talking about their faith when asked and for openly disagreeing with the government's support of same-sex relationships.

Sharing one's faith is 'acting daft'?

Despite much evidence that Christians are being increasingly sidelined in the public sphere, Equalities Minister Harriet Harman dismissed calls for a Parliamentary debate on the issue. Harman says, "This is really just a matter of basic good practice and common sense. There is nothing in any law or guidance that requires people to act daft."

An atheist group, the British Humanist Association (BHA), recently produced guidelines for employers using funding from the government's equality watchdog. The guidelines say that Christians who evangelize at work could be breaking the law. "In some religions it is considered acceptable for believers to evangelize or 'spread the word,'" the BHA told its supporters. But such attempts "are highly likely to amount to harassment of their colleagues."

The Equality and Human Rights Commission gave the BHA £35,000 to pay for the project which gave rise to the guidelines. Legal experts have condemned the claims as "nonsense" and Christian groups have dubbed them "propaganda."

'Christian beheads Muslim' drama backed by BBC trustees

LONDON (Christian Institute) – The BBC Trust has rejected complaints against a TV drama that showed a fanatical British Christian beheading a moderate Muslim. The offending episode of "Bonekickers" was aired in July last year and sparked fresh claims of anti-Christian bias at the BBC.

The BBC Trust, a group of "independent trustees acting in the public interest," rejected suggestions that the drama associated fanatical Christianity with evangelicalism and gave an offensive portrayal of evangelical Christians. Daily Telegraph writer, Damian Thompson, said, "We are deep into the realms of BBC bias and ignorance here. Only a BBC drama series would, to quote the complainant, 'transfer the practice of terrorist beheadings from Islamist radicals to a fantasized group of fundamentalist Christians.'"

When the show was broadcast a TV reviewer for The Observer said, "It wasn't the absurdity of the storyline that buried 'Bonekickers' so much as the BBC's paint-by-numbers version of political correctness." He added, "A Martian watching TV drama of late would probably conclude that the country is crawling with homicidal Islamophobes."

The BBC Trust's decision to support the drama came in the same week the BBC caved to pressure and apologized to the Muslim Council of Britain over accusations that the group supports attacks on British troops.

Bible not special, Koran is

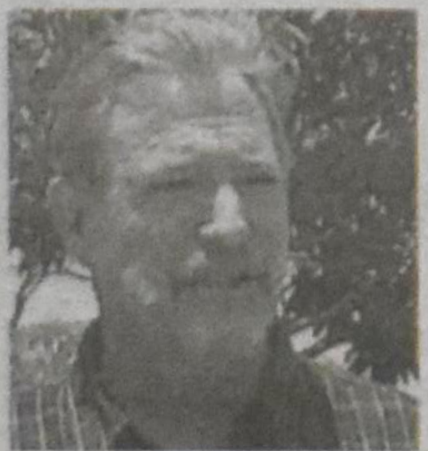
The accusation came in an edition of the BBC's topical debate show "Question Time." A £30,000 payout and an apology have been offered by the BBC despite the fact that the British government has expressed similar sentiments about the same group. In October last year director general of the BBC Mark Thompson said Islam should be treated more sensitively than Christianity because it is less integrated into our society.

In 2006 executives at the BBC admitted that they would consider broadcasting a scene where the Bible was thrown away but they would never do the same with the Koran. In the same year the Archbishop of York, Dr. John Sentamu, said that Christians took "more knocks" in BBC program than other faiths. Sentamu said, "They can do to us what they dare not do to the Muslims. We are fair game because they can get away with it."

San Diego officials tell pastor his home Bible studies are illegal

SAN DIEGO, Calif. (CNA) – A California pastor and his wife say that San Diego County officials asked intrusive religious questions and threatened them with fines because they've been holding a weekly Bible study in their home. In addition, a written warning to Jones originally issued in April cited an "unlawful use of land" and ordered him to stop hosting "religious assemblies."

The incident came to light last month and prompted the Becket Fund, a national religious freedom organization, to offer help. County officials investigated a complaint by a neighbor about parking overflow by guests at a monthly dinner and Bible study held at the Pastor David Jones's Bonita, California, house for the past five years.



Pastor Jones told KGTV that a county code enforcement officer had asked his wife, Mary, for details about the meetings. The questions had nothing to do with parking. "She said, 'Do you say amen?' and my wife said, 'Well, yes,'" Jones said. "And she said, 'Do you say praise the Lord?' she said, 'Well, yes, but what does that have to with it?'"

"They can stop religious activities in the courthouses and that but they're trying to stop prayer in my house," Jones complained.

Chandra Wallar of the county's land use and environment group told KGTV it was the officer's job to determine what kind of event was being hosted to decide what part of county code the event falls under. Wallar said Bible studies are "probably in a very gray area," adding that authorities want to ensure that parking is safe and does not block access to fire trucks or police vehicles.

Eric Rassbach, national litigation director at the Becket Fund, said in a statement that San Diego County had brought "KGB tactics" to Southern California. "Government agents have no place questioning American citizens about how they choose to worship in their own home." It now appears that county officials are backing away from their original warning.

"Unfortunately this case is not all that unusual," Rassbach said. "Local zoning apparatchiks" across the U.S. try to shut down home-based Christian Bible studies and Jewish prayer meetings "all the time." He added, "People of faith should know that federal civil rights law protects against this kind of government intrusion into matters of conscience, and the Becket Fund is ready to help."

Spanish government may suppress religious symbols

MADRID, Spain, (CNA) – *Publico*, a newspaper closely allied with Spain's ruling Socialist party, reported earlier this month that the government is studying the idea of suppressing religious symbols in military barracks, hospitals, jails and public schools, as well as during state funerals or inauguration ceremonies for public officials.

The newspaper reported that Minister of Justice Francisco Caamano referenced the proposal in comments about "creating religiously neutral public spaces."

If the so-called Law on Freedom of Religion and Conscience is adopted, the paper says that Spain would for the first time regulate conscientious objection, as well as the rights of those who profess no religion. The proposal is expected to be rolled out before the end of the year.

Religious liberty guidelines for Christians

Marian Van Til

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE, UK– In response to the "squeeze" Christians are feeling in the public square in Britain, The Christian Institute has developed a guide for Christian employees called "Religious Liberty in the Workplace." The institute exists for "the furtherance and promotion of the Christian religion in the United Kingdom" and "the advancement of education."

The guide, developed on behalf of the institute by Christian lawyer Mark Jones, is written in a straightforward question-answer format.

"Can I send Christmas cards to my colleagues?" (Yes.)

"Should I be allowed time off because of church services/ Christmas/ Easter?" (Retail workers may give an employer three months notice that they are not willing to work on Sundays and they must be "reasonably accommodated.")

"Can I wear a cross?" (Yes – generally.)

"Can I share my faith in the workplace?" (Generally yes. Some employers ban such discussions – illegally. But tact goes a long way.)

"Can I give a Christian opinion on controversial topics?" (Yes. Be tactful.)

"I am worried I might be accused of being homophobic." (If you encounter workplace practices you're uncomfortable with, talk with your employer about your beliefs. Your beliefs per se are not supposed to get you fired.)

"Can I object where my employer has asked me to undertake duties that are contrary to my Christian conscience?" (Yes.)

For all these issue Mark Jones notes, "The legally 'safe' advice would be to minimize any risk of ever creating a personal liability by never doing anything that someone could be offended by. As a Christian lawyer, I could not live by the standard that I would then be commending." Expect some opposition, even when you're tactful, says Jones.

The problem is not that British law does not support Christian liberties, but that many employers don't know the law, and, like the BBC (see story this page), are now less accommodating to Christians than to adherents of other religions.

CRC pastor elected president

OTTAWA (CRCNA) – Rev. Bruce Adema, director of Canadian ministries for the Christian Reformed Church in North America, was elected last month to a three-year term as president of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC). The election occurred in Ottawa during the annual gathering at which members of the CCC held conversations with Canadian parliamentary leaders on issues of justice and development.

Major Gillian Brown of the Salvation Army, Bishop Gilles Cazabon of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and Father John Jillios of the Orthodox Church in America were elected as vice presidents. Don Taylor of the Presbyterian Church in Canada was elected treasurer.

Making up the council are 22 denominations, including Reformed, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Anglican and free churches, as well as the Salvation Army. The CCC represents 85 per cent of the Christians in Canada.

"I see this as a sign of the CRC's growing appreciation for the core unity of the Body of Christ. We have much to learn from other Christian traditions, even as we have much to contribute," said Adema. "My number one hope is that the message that our essential unity in Christ gets communicated down to the churches. I want the Good News to filter down and more and more people to know that Christ has saved a multitude of people," he said.

Adema will remain as director of Canadian ministries for the CRCNA during his tenure as president of the CCC.

Former Spanish president: *ending human life is not a 'right'*

MADRID (CNA) – Former president of Spain Jose Maria Aznar has strongly criticized his country's government for its new proposals to further relax abortion laws. "Abortion is not and can never be a right. What is a right is the right to life," says Aznar. But the government is "pretending to make the ending of human life into a right."

During a speech at the University of San Pablo Aznar warned Spaniards that they should be suspicious of a government that "manifests grave difficulties in distinguishing between what is human and what isn't," especially in a scientific sense. "To proceed down a path that leads to the destruction of the right to life … is, simply, to go backwards on the path of civilization," the former president said.

Nor is it the State's job to "torpedo the educational role parents have with their children." Aznar urged fellow citizens to be concerned when a government uses its power to "obscure the ethical judgment of its citizens, especially of minors," or "assumes the right to decide a matter that should only be the responsibility of the individual." Aznar opposes a proposal that would allow girls 16-18 obtain abortions without parental consent.

Referring to statements by current president Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, Aznar said a government must be called into question when it scorns and attacks the family by saying that parents who worry about their pregnant 16 year-old daughter are "interfering." That lacks even a "minimum sense of ethics and basic common sense," Aznar said, and indicates the government "has lost its way in a society of free citizens, in a plural society at whose service it ought to be."

Nepalese Christians protest church bombing

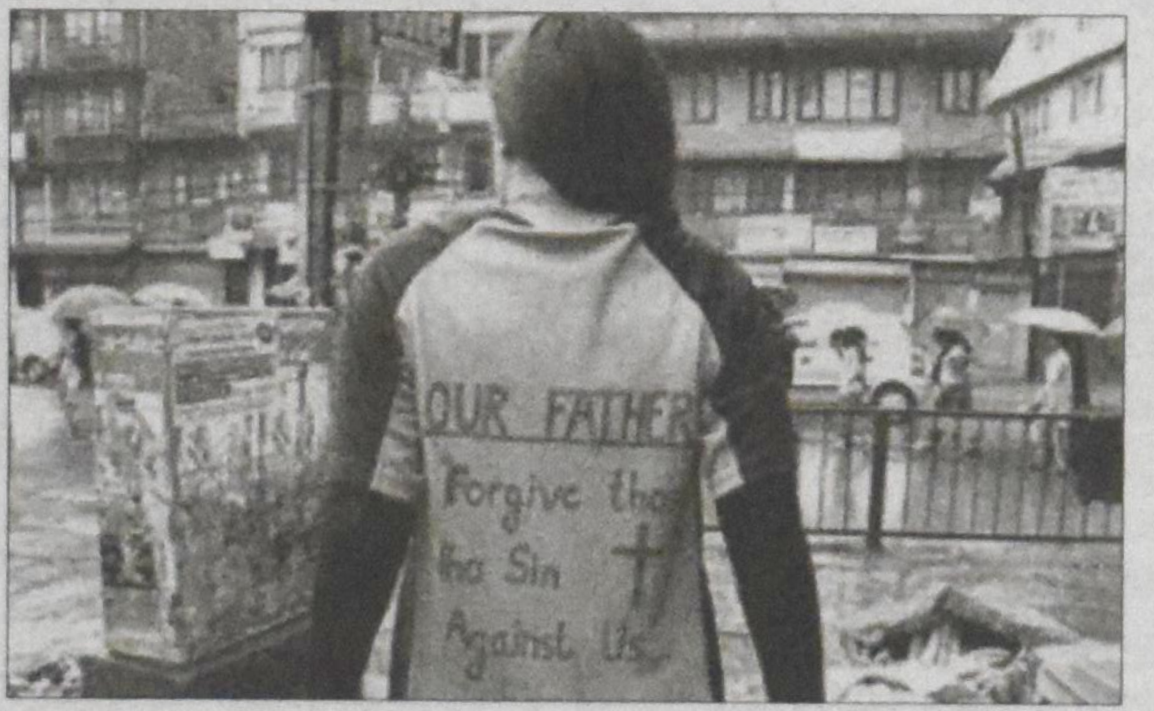
KATHMANDU, Nepal (UCAN) – More than 7,000 Christians marched in Kathmandu late last month in a show of unity to protest the bombing of the main Catholic Church in the capital by Hindu extremists. There are only 7,500 Catholics in all of Nepal among a total of 1.5 million Christians. Almost half the Catholic population joined the march, accompanied by 4,000 Protestants offering their support. A small number of Hindus and Muslims also attended the rally.

A bomb blast ripped through Assumption Catholic Church on May 23 while the main weekly Mass was underway, killing two people and injuring 14, one of whom later died. Nepal Defense Army, a little-known Hindu extremist group, claimed responsibility. The main Mass for Sunday is celebrated on Saturday, the weekly holiday in Nepal.

Assumption Church parishioners led the demonstration, carrying a banner that read, "Goodwill and peace rally against killings, violence and terrorism." Catholic and Protestant churches together organized the event. Apostolic vicar of Nepal Bishop Anthony Sharma, who joined the rally for a brief period, said the main objective was to spread the message that peace must prevail in the country.

Unity

"The Catholic community in Nepal has always served the poor and the needy, and there was no point in targeting the church. Places of worship should always be respected and should not be attacked," Sharma said. "The rally also showed that there is unity among the different denominations of Christians and other religions."



Rev. Isu Jung Karki, a Protestant pastor and rally organizer, said the rally "has spread the message that such attacks on Christians will not scare us but strengthen our unity and our beliefs." Evangeline Rai of the Pentecostal Church took part to protest the "heinous act" against Catholics. She pointed out, "Our church could be next. This is an attack on the entire Christian community in Nepal."

Christian leaders called on the government to provide security at churches and other protection for Christians, compensation to families of the bomb victims and action against those responsible for the attack, as well as guarantee the right to practice one's religion without fear.

In 2006 the Nepalese parliament approved measures that converted Nepal, until then the world's only Hindu nation, into a secular state. About 80 per cent of Nepal's 28.5 million people are Hindus, Buddhists form the next-largest religious community, four per cent are Muslims and Christians are by far the smallest group.

CRC Synod discusses racial relations and Pentecostalism

PALOS HEIGHTS, Ill. – (**Chris Meehan,** CRC Communications)

For the first time in more than 50 years, a Canadian was elected as president of the annual Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

And for the first time in its more than 150-year history, the Synod elected an African American woman as its vice president.

Synod 2009 began meeting Saturday at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Ill., by selecting the officers who will lead it during its week of deliberations.

Rev. William T. Koopmans, pastor of Grace CRC in Chatham, Ontario, was elected as president and Rev. Shelia Holmes, pastor of Northside Community CRC in Paterson, N.J., as vice president.

Elder delegate Donald Dykstra of Hammond, Ind., a veteran of at least 11 synods, and Rev. William Veenstra, pastor of Ancaster (Ontario) CRC, were elected as first and second clerk respectively.

"Even in the midst of the awesome responsibilities we have at Synod, we draw our strength from a great and glorious God," Koopmans told delegates after being elected.

He said in an interview that the post as president is one he will hold with "holy trepidation."

Among his positions in the CRC, Koopmans is chairman of the Interchurch Relations Committee, which will be bringing the Belhar Confession to Synod for discussion next week.

Synod has been asked to send the document to CRC churches with a recommendation that it be reviewed and adopted as another confession of the church. Synod 2012 would be asked to act on it.

"We are encouraged. Years of preparation have gone into this," he says. "I hope we will have a constructive discussion, but it will not be my job to determine which way it will go," he says. "At the same time, the Belhar is a document that expresses profound unity in the body of Christ."

Discussion around race

Holmes says she is pleased to be the first African American woman elected as an officer of synod.

"This is very significant. It is about unity, reconciliation and justice, and especially to be reconciled to one another," she says. She says she is encouraged that the CRC will be discussing the Belhar, a document that was written in response to the policy of racial discrimination that existed for many years in South Africa.

While written in a certain historical context, the Belhar is a wide-ranging statement that appeals for unity among all of God's people. The Synod of Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Mich., recently adopted the Belhar as a confession of the church.

"We are realizing that we (ethnic minorities) are part of this denomination," says Holmes. "We are not just sitting back. God has positioned us in place to talk about unity and reconciliation.… Change is happening by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Koopmans says that besides the Belhar, Synod will be discussing proposals related to faith formation and how the church should respond to Third Wave Pentecostalism. Candidates for ministry will be presented and the ministry budget for next year will be approved.

Garden of banishment; garden of grace

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Several years ago, I wrote a drama entitled *Garden of Banishment; Garden of Grace*. While writing it, I thought about God's creativity and majesty, about creation "groaning as in the pains of child birth," and about the future day when "the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Romans 8:21-22).

Since gardening is an activity conducive to spiritual reflection, I thought I'd share what I learned when I wrote the drama. Perhaps you, too, can reflect on it this summer when you transplant perennials, hoe weeds, water flowers, or prune bushes.

Seven Seasons

The Bible is a story about two gardens, the Garden of Banishment and the Garden of Grace. It's also the story of seasons, but not in the order that we experience them. Each year we anticipate summer after spring, fall after summer, winter after fall, and spring after winter.

But in the biblical narrative, a destructive, death-bearing winter followed hard and fast on the heels of a perfect garden spring. Winter was followed by a long season of autumn, or fall – an appropriate name – for in that time, the consequences of a fall resulted in taxing, tiring years. Yet, for some, those years were filled with yearning expectation. Then, surprisingly, chaotic, earthshaking winter came again. But, though winter came twice, it didn't remain. This time spring followed hard and fast on winter's heels – three days later, in fact. Then a strange season followed – fall, yet with a difference, because fall and spring embraced. It's a mystery. Yet it's true. We now live in the season of fall-spring.

When the season of fall-spring ends, summer – the seventh season and time of completion – will arrive. It's the season of not-yet, a future season. In our summer season we expect the sun to shine, but in this future summer season there will be no need for a sun.

God was and is in charge of the Gardens. He was and is in charge of the seasons. He planted the biblical story and it grew. And it is still growing.

Anna Bowen, 22, plants leeks

she plunges her
cracked fingers in-
to earth mothering
man and
seed

the sharp odors teach-
ing her that light-
ning begins in the
ground and through
us reaches the
heavens

– Brett Alan Dewing

Spring, winter, and fall

Let's take a closer look at the Gardens and the seasons.

The first season was a perfect garden spring. God, the Master Gardener loved beauty and diversity. He created a myriad of flowers – brilliant orange poppies, fragrant red bee balm, vibrant yellow primroses, lanky purple hollyhocks, and many more besides; he made a multitude of vegetables – plump red tomatoes, green bell peppers, pungent leeks, and numerous others; he created an army of garden creatures – podgy bumble bees, roly-poly potato bugs, slithering earthworms, creatures beyond numbering.

The Explulsion from Paradise *by Charles Joseph Natoire*

God's garden revealed who he was – Lover of his world and of his people. The garden was the theater displaying his character: infinite creativity, profound passion, unlimited enthusiasm, and unsurpassable joy.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it (Genesis 2:15). The woman that the Lord God later created "from the rib he had taken out of the man" (Genesis 2:22) was called to the same task – to worship the Master Gardener by diligently and devotedly working in his garden. The man and woman were called to be gardeners who mirrored the Master Gardener in all they did.

A destructive, death-bearing winter followed hard and fast on the heels of the perfect garden spring. The serpent, Satan, approached the woman in the Garden of Eden. Craftily, he tempted her to sin against God. She fell for his lies, and the man did, too. When they sinned in the Garden of Eden, instead of imitating the Master Gardener as they had been taught, they tried to usurp the Master Gardener's place. So God banished them from the Garden of Eden. It became the Garden of Banishment.

Winter was followed by a long season of fall, as we so appropriately name it. For in that time, the consequences of the fall into sin and the banishment from the Garden of Eden resulted in taxing, tiring years. Yet, for some, those years were filled with yearning expectation.

In those years, God, the Master Gardener, planted a vineyard. That vineyard was his chosen people Israel – "The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight" (Isaiah 5:7a).

From Israel, the garden of God's delight, the Messiah, the Savior of the world, was to be born. Even though Israel repeatedly displayed more thistles and thorns of disobedience than bounteous, beautiful flowers of true worship, God's plan could not be thwarted (Job 42:2b). The one whom the apostle John called "the true vine" (John 15:1a) was born in the little town of Bethlehem.

Grace amid pain

Then, surprisingly, chaotic, confusing, earthshaking winter came again. But, though winter came twice, it didn't remain. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus – the true vine – submitted to the will of his heavenly Father, knowing that he had been sent to earth to die for the sins of the people. But his submission was not without agony. Jesus fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done" (Matt. 26:42).

The Garden of Gethsemane became the Garden of Grace when Jesus counted the cost and obeyed his Father. God, the Master Gardener, so loved his vineyard, his planted people, that he gave his one and only Son, the true vine, so that whoever repents of his desire to be the master gardener of his own life and submits instead to God, the Master Gardener, will have eternal life.

Spring followed hard and fast on winter's heels – three days later, in fact. When Mary Magdalene went to the tomb where Jesus had been laid, she saw that the stone which had been by its entrance had been rolled away, and she began to cry. When angels asked her why she was crying, she replied that someone had taken her Lord away, and she didn't know where they had put him.

Then she saw the Son of the Master Gardener – Jesus – and, ironically, mistook him for the gardener. When Jesus spoke her name, she recognized him and clung to him in adoration.

Our present yearning

A strange season followed those events – fall, yet with a difference, because fall and spring embraced. Its mystery shapes our lives today.

In the strange season of fall-spring, remember Jesus' words spoken to his disciples in a parable, for we live in the time of paradox. The kingdom has come, and yet it is still coming in its fullness: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches" (Matt. 13:31-32).

When the season of fall-spring ends, summer – the seventh season and time of completion – will arrive. In a parable, Jesus pointed to that future season: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near" (Luke 21:25-31).

In our summer season we expect the sun to shine. But in this future summer season, there will be no need for a sun. In Revelation, the apostle John explains why: "The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will be their light. And they will reign forever and ever (Rev. 22:3b-5).

This summer as you are gardening, remember the Garden of Banishment and the Garden of Grace. In hope, anticipate the return of Christ, when all things will be made new.

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema (sonyavf55 @hotmail.com.) is a freelance writer living in St. Catharines, ON.

To be or not to be ... a berry

Brett Alan Dewing

My quest began quietly, several years ago. I was working third shift, 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., filing tax forms for the New York state government. It was, you can imagine, not the most intellectually nor creatively stimulating of jobs, but after awhile my hands and eyes could do the work themselves, and my mind was free for some very rewarding contemplations. We had a meal break, which occurred around 2:30 a.m., and to avoid the fatal semantic gymnastics that plague third shift life (is it morning or night, dawn or bedtime?), I referred to this time as lunch.

It was on one of my lunch breaks, beneath the stars in Johnson City, New York, that one sentence sparked years of doubt, disbelief, and discovery. As I twisted open my Snapple White Tea, I instinctively flipped the cap over to read the "Snapple Fact" inscribed on the inside.

This reading of the Snapple Fact had become an important part of my lunchtime routine. I would rage at the seventh repetition of fact #38 (honestly, the world is full of facts – they shouldn't resurface so much!), twist the sentences into trivia questions for my coworkers (which bounces higher: rubber or glass?), or smile smugly when I came across something I already knew.

But that day/night, the words inked on the bottom of my iced tea cap caught me totally by surprise: "The largest berry is the *avocado!*"

The avocado?

For the rest of the night, as my hands flicked through tax forms, my mind ruminated on the esoteric knowledge it had received. The avocado? A berry? But a berry was ... well, it was small, for one ... and round, usually ... and sometimes bumpy. Obviously I had never put much thought into what constituted berryhood, as evidenced by my far-from-Webster-ready definition. As I wandered grocery store aisles and reached for fruit for my "lunches" I wondered, is this apple a berry, this cucumber? I didn't know how to function in a world where a berry could pop out of any fruit or vegetable and take you unawares.

I began my own private poll. Whenever I thought of it, I would ask the person closest to me: what makes a berry a berry? I heard a variety of answers over the subsequent weeks and months, but none of them was any better than my own initial definition. It seemed that no one really knew what a berry was – but we all agreed on what it was not (ie, an avocado).

Finally, one friend (current *CC* columnist Brian Dijkema) took a truly novel approach when asked: he looked it up! As it turns out, the common usage of "berry" to describe rasp, straw, black, and boysen varieties is botanically inaccurate. In reality, none of those are berries, but rather aggregate fruits.

Well, then, what doth a berry make? Simply this: "a fruit in which the entire ovary wall ripens into an edible pericarp. The flowers of these plants have a superior ovary and they have one or more carpels within a thin covering and very fleshy interiors. The seeds are embedded in the common flesh of the ovary. " See, easy.

The (garden) plot thickens

Perhaps some of you out there can make either a head or tail of this definition, but I am not among your ranks.

This left me even more confused. I was in truth no closer to understanding what a berry was, but now I had to add to the list of what it wasn't. How could any mind make sense of a world where strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, and cranberries were not berries at all but the avocado was?

I began by trying to discover just what a "pericarp" was. As it turned out, that was far from simple, but I can save you the time and energy by summarizing: it is the entire fruit except for the seed. This is a simplistic but not-too-far-off reduction. The pericarp includes the skin or rind, the flesh, and even the pit of many fruits. This means that a berry is a fruit that develops from a single plant ovary. It is a "simple fruit" – all one piece, unlike the raspberry and its ilk, which are formed of many tiny fruits.

And it seems that the avocado is not alone in its surprising status as berry (or even fruit, for that matter). Also among the berries is the tomato, the eggplant, and the chili pepper. Other slightly less shocking berries include the kiwi, the guava, the grape, and the pomegranate. And finally, among the few true berries to be commonly referred to as berries: the gooseberry, elderberry, and currant.

And so as the gardening season forges ahead, take careful notice of what you're really growing. Odds are you've planted more berries – or less – than you suspect. And next time you head off to a "berry festival" or "berry pie night", try bringing along your famous guacamole and see just how many there are in the know about berries.

Brett Alan Dewing is co-editor of CC.

Here's a small appetizer to get you hungry for next month's food-theme issue of CC.

Can you spot the berries?

Beware the British garden police

Lynn Hunt

A scandal was exposed at this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show when a banned item was spotted in one of the lush display beds.

The illegal object was a garden gnome named Borage. Once spied, Royal Horticulture Society officials moved swiftly to have the gnome removed from the premises.

According to The Times of London, organizers were even more shocked to learn that one of the members of their own ruling council had been "implicated in the affair."

Jekka McVicar, a 13-time gold medal winner at Chelsea, had put together what was described as a stunning display of medicinal and culinary herbs in the Grand Pavilion. Since this was to be her last appearance in the show she decided to place Borage, a tiny statue holding a fishing rod, behind some of the greenery.

© Alex Lentati / ES

A show official insisted that the "offending gnome be ejected" reminding the offender that gnomes are against the rules at the Chelsea Flower Show. The *Times* reports that the country's gardening elite consider them to be taboo. (Is it just snobbery? asked the Guardian.)

Mrs. McVicar fought back saying her gnome was in "wonderfully good taste." She went on to declare that he is "not brightly coloured … and is a subtle gnome." She refused to extract Borage from the display but promised to cover him with foliage.

Apparently she was successful in her efforts since Queen Elizabeth and other members of the royal family were able to view the often-spectacular displays without further incident – and without having to avert their eyes.

Even though Britain is suffering through a recession, almost 150,000 tickets were sold for this, the 87th Chelsea show. It is not known if many of the visitors would have shied away had they known the outlawed gnome was lurking in the basils.

Then again, I'm assuming many who love Chelsea don't consider themselves to be among the gardening elite. They just enjoy seeing all those fabulous flowers and plants.

And like me, probably didn't realize gnomes are no-nos.

Getting Unstuck — Arlene Van Hove

Joining the conversation...

Ever noticed how various television stations and local newspapers invite viewers to get on the blog and "join the conversation?" Well, that is what I thought I would do in this month's column.

I read Sonya VanderVeen Feddema's review of "Christless Christianity" by Michael Horton with interest (*CC* of May 25, 2009). I believe Horton critiques the prosperity gospel including Joel Osteen, author of *Your Best Life Now: Seven Steps to Living at Your Full Potential and Become a Better You.* I will admit, however, I did not read these books but want to "join the conversation" based on what was written in the *CC*.

The oprahfication of Christianity

Obviously, Horton is not happy with the church offering practical self-help to its congregants at the expense of challenging the flock to rediscover "radical sinfulness" so that they can appreciate the nature of God's "radical grace." At the same time, the argument, while couched in different contexts and words, is an old one – saviour therapeutic advice does not salvation bring!

Along this line, I was channel surfing a while back and came across a talk (or he was preaching to his church?) by Joel Osteen to a filled-to-capacity stadium on the topic of "kindness." I listened for a few moments and could not believe so many people came out to hear this very simplistic talk any five-year old should have learned in kindergarten. I remember thinking, what is it with the average American (or possibly Canadian) that they need reminders in their adult years to be kind to others?

So, I think there is something to it that American Christianity has been watered down, as Horton would say, to being "nice, kind, acceptable and non offensive" – hence the term "moralistic therapeutic deism" or the "oprahfication of Christianity" – an acceptable and tolerant form of religion in our diverse twenty-first century.

Nesting in a safe box

Yet, how more safe and secure can we become in this complicated world than to believe I am forgiven for anything and everything because Jesus died for me, I am unconditionally loved by God; I am eternally saved because I acknowledge Jesus as my Saviour, and, last but not least, I have the absolute and only truth in this world. These beliefs alone can tempt us to nest "smug as a bug" in a box of our own making.

Still, Horton is challenging Christians to take God more seriously and stresses he speaks not from a position of "antiseptic purity" but in humility, proclaiming, "Woe is me! For I am lost: for I am a man of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" Unfortunately, I am not impressed when writers quote texts when personalizing their feelings would be more helpful.

Rediscovering sin and grace

What Horton seems to be suggesting is for us to examine ourselves in terms of our "radical sinfulness" and make the necessary changes to reflect the "radical grace of God." I wonder if he knows what he is asking. Socrates was quite right in saying "an unexamined life is not worth living." And that more of us do not take his advice is testimony to the hard work and potentially uncomfortable journey self-examination brings. We will practically do anything not to look at ourselves, as I have written before. What makes our self-examination less likely is that this kind of journey cannot be forced or demanded under pressure. In any case, I will be waiting for the sequel to see how he plans to "push us out of our nests."

Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC.

A spiritual body

[...]It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

I Cor. 15:44a

A. A. VanRuler

This is the ending of Paul's hymn of contrasts. First he says, "The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power." These are all attempts to express the mystery of the resurrection in ever new images.

But then the apostle does the bravest thing: He discards the simple adjectives and connects them now to a noun, namely, *body.* But he distinguishes *two:* the natural and the spiritual body! A natural body is sown, but a spiritual one is raised.

Body and soul

It is important here to underscore that Paul is not speaking here literally of a natural, but of a *psyche,* kind of body. The trouble is not with the body itself, but that it is a *psyche* body. Mankind, in need of tremendous deliverance – such as provided in the resurrection – suffers from misery, not so much in the body itself, but in the *psyche,* the soul.

The body is subject to the soul; it is the soul's organ; it is governed and formed by the soul. The soul is the way in which a person behaves in God's presence. He goes against God and turns away from him. She doesn't want what God wants and runs roughshod over all the plans God has and disturbs God's created reality.

It is actually not the body that has made the soul unhappy. The opposite is true: It is the soul that has made the body perishable, shameful and weak. Now we must admit right away that the body has been subjected to the cruel, perishable reality so much that in many ways it itself can become a burden.

What is natural?

Still, we have to be realistic here. Evil does not come from the physical reality out there and then penetrates to a person's soul on the inside. No, evil emanates from the soul, from the way a person manages himself and his body and with which he experiences the reality of his world.

The reality of this truth bids us speak in a similar fashion about what's temporary and what's eternal.

With great self-evidence we are used to speaking of the body as being natural, subject to death and perishable, and that in the soul, in our internal humanity, we find what is imperishable, eternal.

But that is not in accordance with what the apostle says here. Twice he uses the word *body.* He speaks about a natural and a spiritual body. In a certain sense, then, the body has something eternal. There is always a body, a *corpus*, both in the present age and in the age of the resurrection. But evidently the soul, the *psyche*, as the governing and controlling principle of existence will one day be done away with. It will be overcome. Instead of the psyche, there will be the spiritual.

What is spiritual?

There has been much debate about the term *spiritual body.* There have been those who said that Paul in the future age expects to receive a body that is made of quite different stuff from the present body, namely of *spirit stuff.* The spirit will then be the stuff, the matter of which the body in the resurrection is made.

However, it is not likely that the apostle means to say this. When he speaks of a spiritual body, he really does not mean a body that is made of soul matter. His thinking is generally much too concrete for that. When he says *body*, then he really means a physical body, visible and palpable. But he expresses, in the words *a spiritual body* that this body is an organ of – and therefore subject to – the soul, the psyche. The soul that is now rebellious toward God will then be totally renewed and totally subject to the spirit, the Holy Spirit.

Anyway, it is clear that a person will then behave according to the original intent of God. She will manage herself as a body, as a moment in the total created reality of God and in his presence according to God's goodwill. She will then embody God's glory and be glorious.

Then the body will fully be the Holy Spirit's temple, the dwelling of God. Then mankind will have true style. There will be rock hard solidity in his existence. His being will receive reality, and that also means *eternity*. That is the core of the message of the resurrection, and it gives us a definite sense of reality. For God we are eternal and we can indeed be such.

Now and not yet

However, let us not think of this as merely a future reality, something we expect only for the glorious kingdom. Not only do we know about Christ's resurrection but also his eventual return. Between the two we have the outpouring as well as the subsequent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He lives in us, i.e., in our body, the body that is already now the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Everybody having received God's love and basking in it is now already, with all his earthly and physical existence, in principle a temple of the Holy Spirit. The Christian way of existing in this world is in essence already having that spiritual body of which the apostle speaks.

In other places he calls it therefore *inner man.* This is, in a sense, a painful expression, because by it he also means that this spiritual body cannot yet come to full expression and blossoming in our visible world. It is there and it is there in its full reality. We sense it in our selves, i.e., we experience it in our being redeemed, in our resurrected creatureliness. But it must withdraw itself constantly, it goes into hiding. In all things we would love to live fully in the light of the resurrection and apply that knowledge and work it out. It is not possible, because the power of sin – in our hearts, in all hearts and in society as a whole – is still there. That's why all things still happen in a *natural* way and not a *pneumatic* (spiritual) way.

Translated by Bram Hoff. Bram lives in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario.

Columns

Words from Wild Horses

Kenny Warkentin

Thoughts on reconciliation

One of the things I love to do is dialogue with others about how Christ is asking us to live. A good friend explained my writing as follows: "Kenny gets a thought, and he goes about getting it out of his head by blogging what he is thinking, allowing him to process what he is taking in."

Lately, these thoughts have been on reconciliation. Interestingly, I have been hearing more people talk about what this means, and how we are to walk this out.

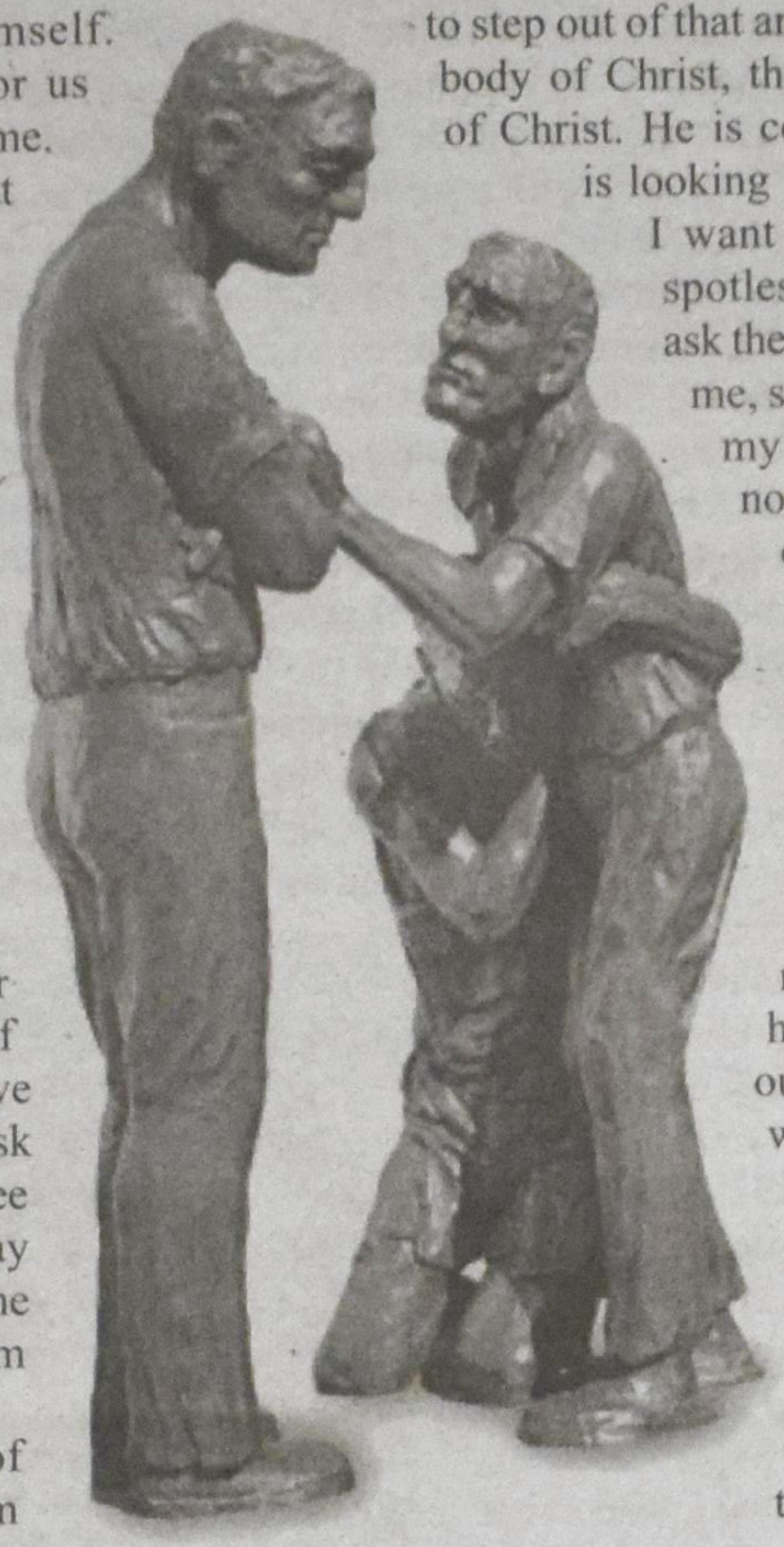
The Holy Spirit has been really speaking to me about motives – about why I do or say specific things. There are times when I would like to just sit down with specific people and hash things out. To say... "Come on!...Get with it!" That statement doesn't really speak with a lot of grace. It is pretty black and white.

What gets me, though, (okay, I am harder on Christians because I'm one of them) is that we do so many things to look great and, yet, can't seem to get it together to forgive or reconcile. Specifically, when someone wrongs us, or we hold all the offenses in until one day we explode and we put a boundary down and say, you hurt me and so you are unsafe. We spend so much time with the issue in our head and never talk about it, and then we think it easier to just cut the person out of our lives, rather than realize that we, too, are in the wrong.

He did it first

As I look at Christ, I see a Saviour, who is all about reconciliation. He reconciles us to himself. He sacrificed himself for us and asks us to do the same. Recently I heard some great teaching on how David walked this out in his own life – "walking in meekness in the face of injustice." How often do we walk in meekness when we face injustice? When do we give it over to God to be our advocate, our help, our friend? Do we ever lay down our own feelings of being offended and ask, "Lord, what would you have me do?" rather than shut the person out of our lives. How often do we look at our own sin or ask the Lord, to "search me, see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting?" (Psalm 139:24)

It got me thinking of my own life, and how I am prone to not speak out because of passivity, thinking, if I did that, the other person may not like me anymore. I am being challenged to step out of that and speak truth, to the body of Christ, the Church, the bride of Christ. He is coming back, and he is looking for a spotless bride. I want to be one of those spotless brides. I want to ask the Holy Spirit to search me, so that I can work out my sin with him. I am not happy to stay stuck or in the same place, and I value people enough to want reconciliation, restoration, repair. We are never meant to not do the hard work of reconciliation. If we have a problem with our spouse or child, do we just put up a wall and refuse to talk to them, or shut them out of our lives? Why then do we do it to others? It actually cripples the other person as well as ourselves. Each action that we do or refuse to do either brings life or death.



I wonder, then, how are we seeking to reconcile with those who may have offended us?

I wonder, then, are you willing to stop and look at your own sin?

I wonder, then, can you see Christ? Can you see his sacrifice, when we didn't deserve it, and realize, we are called to be Christ to everyone in our lives?

Who is watching us live this out? Our unsaved brothers and sisters! They are watching to see if we are fostering forgiveness, love and reconciliation. If we aren't doing it, then as harsh as it seems, why do we preach, why do we speak? Are we then just a clanging cymbal, hurting the ears we are talking to? I feel challenged to walk out reconciliation, whether I like it or not, because my Saviour came and did it first for me. How about you?

Kenny Warkentin (paintpent@mts.net) is an avid blogger, thinker and artist.

Note: Pictured is sculpture entitled *Reconciliation* by Margaret Adams Parker based on the story of the prodigal son.

I'm spiritual, but I'm not religious

Bill Steele

Sitting next to a fellow passenger on the plane, we got into conversation. He asked me what my work was. When I told him I was a Christian missionary he said, "I was baptised in the Gereformeerd Kerk in the Netherlands, but now I'm just spiritual. I'm not religious." There was no tradition of Christian doctrine to which he adhered and no church in which he participated. He engaged in a number of spiritual practices without, so he thought, practising a religion.

From time to time I meet people who say the same thing, "I'm spiritual but I'm not religious." Is such a condition possible? I suggest not. Spirituality always presupposes beliefs on which it is founded. My fellow passenger, a physician with Doctors Without Borders, told me about his spiritual practices. He took time each day for twenty minutes of meditation, morning and evening; he was a good person; he helped others when he could, and he respected the environment. When I asked him what he believed about meditation, it turned out that it involved a whole set of religious beliefs.

Unacknowledged faith

He believed that there is some kind of Supreme Being, but not a personal God. It is the sum of the unity of all people who ever lived. It is the universal human spirit. Meditation helps him achieve harmony with the "All." I discovered that he believed that there is no such thing as sin. People have weaknesses out of which they can be helped to grow by education and by teaching them spiritual practices. Their weaknesses are caused partly by their social environment. Improving their social environment will provide less occasion for their weaknesses to emerge in their behaviour. He said that the universe has no goal. Sometime in the future the sun will burn out, and that will be the end of humanity and all life on the planet. He hopes that there is intelligent life somewhere else in some universe. It would be a pity for intelligence to disappear.

I asked him what evidence he had for those beliefs.

"They just make sense to me," he said; "they seem self-evident."

"Don't you think that those are really religious beliefs," I asked.

He thought about it for a moment. "Call them religious if you like. They are just my personal beliefs. They are not the beliefs of a religion. They are not dogma. No one else has to believe them. If you have Christian beliefs, that's o.k. But people won't go to some kind of hell because they don't believe them. I cannot understand why missionaries try to convert other people, who already have their own beliefs, to their [the missionaries'] religion."

Humans are love

What about love," I asked. "You serve with *Doctors Without Borders,"* I said, "you must have a lot of love for humanity."

He reflected for a few seconds. "I wouldn't call it love. Call it compassion. I'm a compassionate person. That's why I say I'm a good person."

I asked him if he thought Jesus was a loving person.

"I don't think about Jesus," he answered. "I suppose he must have existed," he said, "but he's been made into a myth; all those supposed miracles! They are ridiculous."

"Can we talk some more about love?" I asked.

He said, "Sure."

I asked if he thought that it might be possible that true human nature is love but that something has gone wrong with it.

"Could be," he said, "if there is such a thing as true human nature, but that implies some sort of standard. You talk about true human nature only because you believe in a God who created humanity with a certain kind of nature. Humanity evolved to be what we are. We are not love. You think that we are love because you believe we are created in God's image. You believe he is Love."

"Yes," I said, "I believe that God is Love and that he created humanity in his image. We are love, but something has gone terribly wrong with us. You are on your way to Sierra Leone to serve people who have been mutilated by child soldiers. I have difficulty seeing how you can offer them hope if you don't believe that people are love, created by a God who is Love."

"You are right," he said, "The only hope I have to give them is education and teaching them spirituality."

This man is really a very religious person. His spirituality is an expression of a whole set of religious beliefs. Is he also an unwitting, postmodern missionary of the modern religion of education and his own brand of spirituality?

Bill Steele grew up in Scotland, studied at Westminster Theological Seminary and Knox College, served as as pastor in the Presbyterian Church in Canada, then as a pastor in the Christian Reformed Church, and as Missionary with Christian Reformed World Missions in Guinea, West Africa. He is seeking a call to serve as a Pastor in the CRC.

Columns

More Than a Degree
Brandon Jorritsma

Lessons of adulthood

I achieved pretty decent grades in university, but I have regrets about the numerous rushed, late, and incomplete assignments I submitted in my second and third years. Why had things changed so much from my high school days where all assignments were done well and done on time?

I would like to say my work suffered as a result of the abrupt change in the social environment. I moved away from home for the first time into a townhouse with seven other students. Too often, I chose to socialize instead of study.

I would like to say that my work suffered because the information-rich environment was a constant distraction to me, in particular the Internet. I gorged on the smorgasbord of Youtube videos and Wikipedia articles, but also, while doing legitimate research, I became distracted. A tangential strand of information would call my name, like an eager child tugging at my pant leg for attention, even though I didn't have time for it. Researching the life of Lee Harvey Oswald, for example led to an in-depth analysis of the various conspiracy theories concerning JFK's assassination.

I'd like to say that my work suffered because I was intimidated by my growing awareness of the wide deltas of human knowledge. What shall I say that hasn't already been said more eloquently by someone more intelligent than myself? And can I accurately discuss something without reading everything that has been said about it before? I handed in a paper on George Grant's *Lament for a Nation* a week late simply because I felt that before I could compose anything worthwhile, I needed to read a ridiculous amount on Grant and the period in Canada's history on which he was writing.

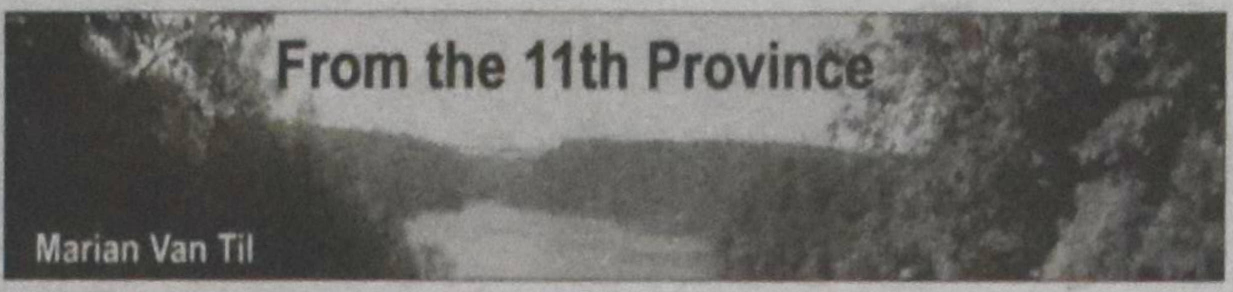
Learning to be responsible

All these things contributed to my dissatisfaction with my performance in university. But they all happened because of a bigger problem: my general failure to plan ahead and take full responsibility for my studies. Distractions and difficulties are not excuses to avoid work. I had entered a world where I was treated as an adult and was expected to take the initiative in my studies. No high school teacher was there to take me step by step through my assignments and provide in-class time to finish readings. No parent was checking up on me, making sure I did all my homework before visiting friends. Professors were eager to help, but I should have let them know if I was having difficulties. Until the delivery of final marks, only I knew how I was progressing in my classes.

And that is the nature of adulthood. I can't expect someone else to take care of my duties for me, nor expect a "do-over." There are so many questions that should not be ignored until they demand attention: What opportunities do I have to do meaningful work? Where should I make my home? What is the most responsible way to manage time, finances, and everything else I've been entrusted with?

Though I can seek the help of the wise and the more experienced, come the reckoning, I alone am responsible for how I respond to challenges. That's just one of many things I learned in university.

Brandon Jorritsma (Brandon_jorritsma@hotmail.com) is a graduate of Redeemer University College. He is studying publishing at Ryerson University in Toronto, Ontario.

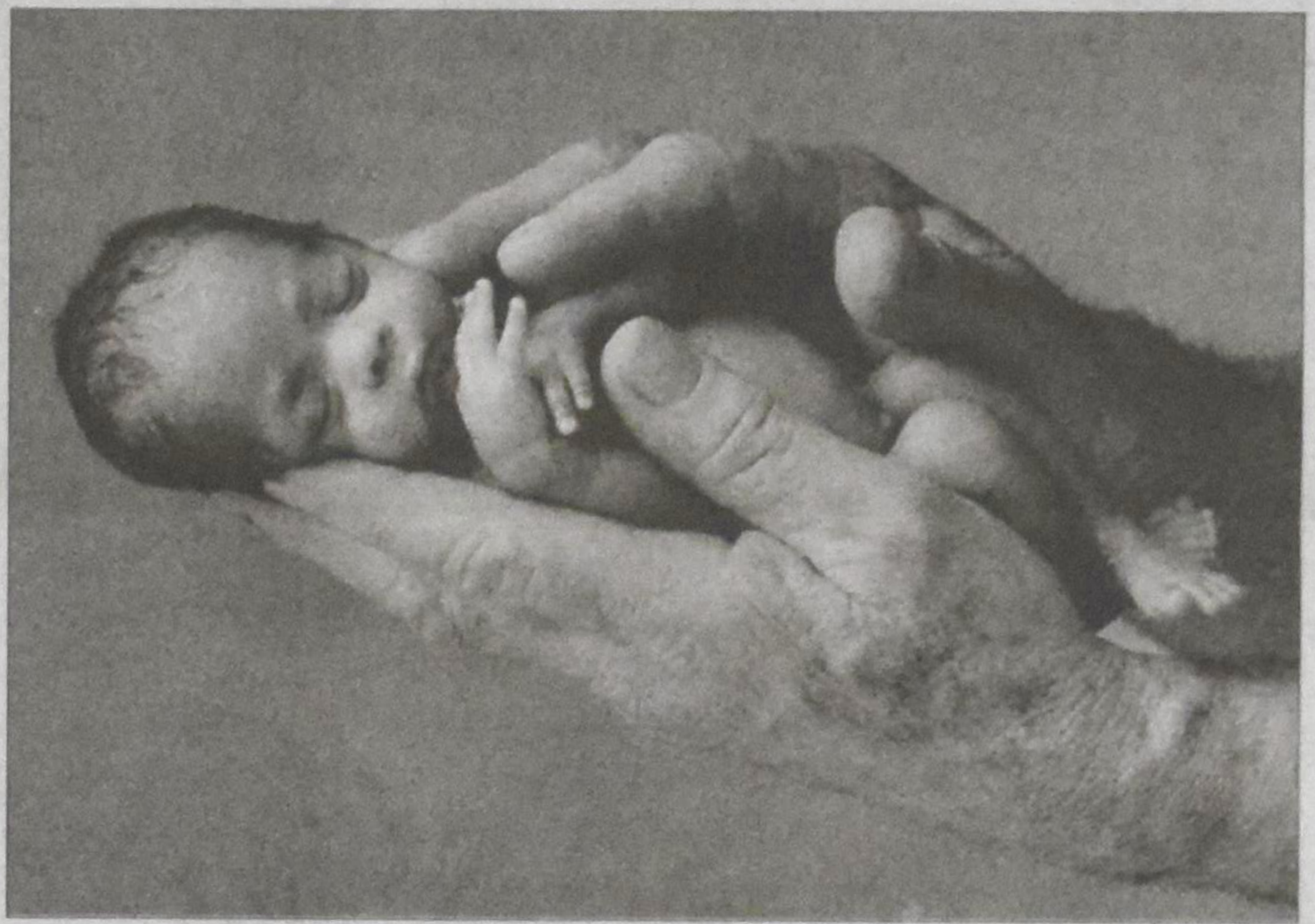


My President vs. God's standard of good

I am reluctant to write about political matters here. I hope readers know that that reluctance does not come from any unconcern of mine for social justice issues or apathy about what is going on in the world; nor from a fear of straightforwardly stating my opinions. I don't suffer from *that* affliction! Rather, my reluctance comes from a lack of enthusiasm for being seen as political or partisan. (Those qualities can close off communication.) With this column I'm making an exception. But I'm wary.

When we Christians discuss the ethical, moral (religious) issues underlying current news and events, such talk can leave behind the bitter taste of unpleasant disagreements, a dismissal of each other's points of view and the confirmation that such-and-such a fellow Christian is a hopeless [fill in the blank: conservative, liberal, bigot, Neanderthal, nutcase, naïf, and likely a menace to the Kingdom of God].

We Christians can't escape the context and environment in which God has placed us. Our own sometimes hot-blooded arguments are a reflection of the volatile climate in the secular public squares in both Canada and the U.S. (and throughout the world). That volatility has arisen because there's a spiritual battle going on whose lines are ever more stark. Satan is trying to expand his deadly principalities and enlarge his poisonous powers by means of increasingly devious attacks on the Church of Jesus Christ. It's important to see the disquieting issues we face in every area of life in that context. If you don't see that big picture and its spiritual nature, I suggest re-reading the book of Revelation periodically.



Another standard

We believe that "neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39). But it appears more and more as if the world can fell us merely with the rapier of neatly thrusted words of evil intent. (Yet remember the irony of Luther's poetic image: one little Word shall fell Satan.)

Behind words that mock God, his created order and his Kingdom (and us, his representatives) are God-mocking philosophies. But many advocates of those "know not what they do." Presumably abortion rights activists or those who vilify Christians for deep opposition to gay marriage – to name two volatile evils at the forefront of the "culture wars" – don't believe they themselves are bad, much less evil, people. They see themselves as human-rights crusaders. But they are judging themselves and the world they see by a standard that owes nothing to God, his law or his will for his world and everything and everyone he placed in it.

Scripture tells us there is no one who does good, not one. We who love and serve God are capable of producing the good fruit of the Spirit only because Christ spilled his blood for us and his Spirit is at work in us regenerating us. Those who do not serve God (and therefore love themselves or even others more than God) are capable of doing good because of God's sheer graciousness. Our theology calls it "common grace" – common only in its widespread lavishness, not its quality. That grace is what allows unbelievers' good works to carry at least the aroma of sweet Spirit fruit. (And we are not privy to how the Spirit may be working in the lives of many who currently deny that Jesus is Lord or even that God exists.)

Troubling approach to 'good'

What perplexes me is not that unbelievers do "good." What confounds me is that some Christians (who by definition strive to do God's will daily) methodically insist on doing or causing what is grossly wrongheaded by God's standard, and therefore ultimately evil. I find the President of my country to be in that position. I have the space to bring up only one issue (there are more that trouble me). Consider this for now:

Why and how can a Christian systematically – and it has been stunningly systematic – set about to get rid of *all* laws that protect unborn babies as well as the consciences of medical practitioners who refuse to perform abortions. From his first week in office, when he restored U.S. funding for a foreign abortion program, Barack Obama has been carefully dismantling pro-life laws and appointing dozens of extreme pro-abortion advocates to influential posts, from the Cabinet, to advisory panels, judgeships and soon the Supreme Court.

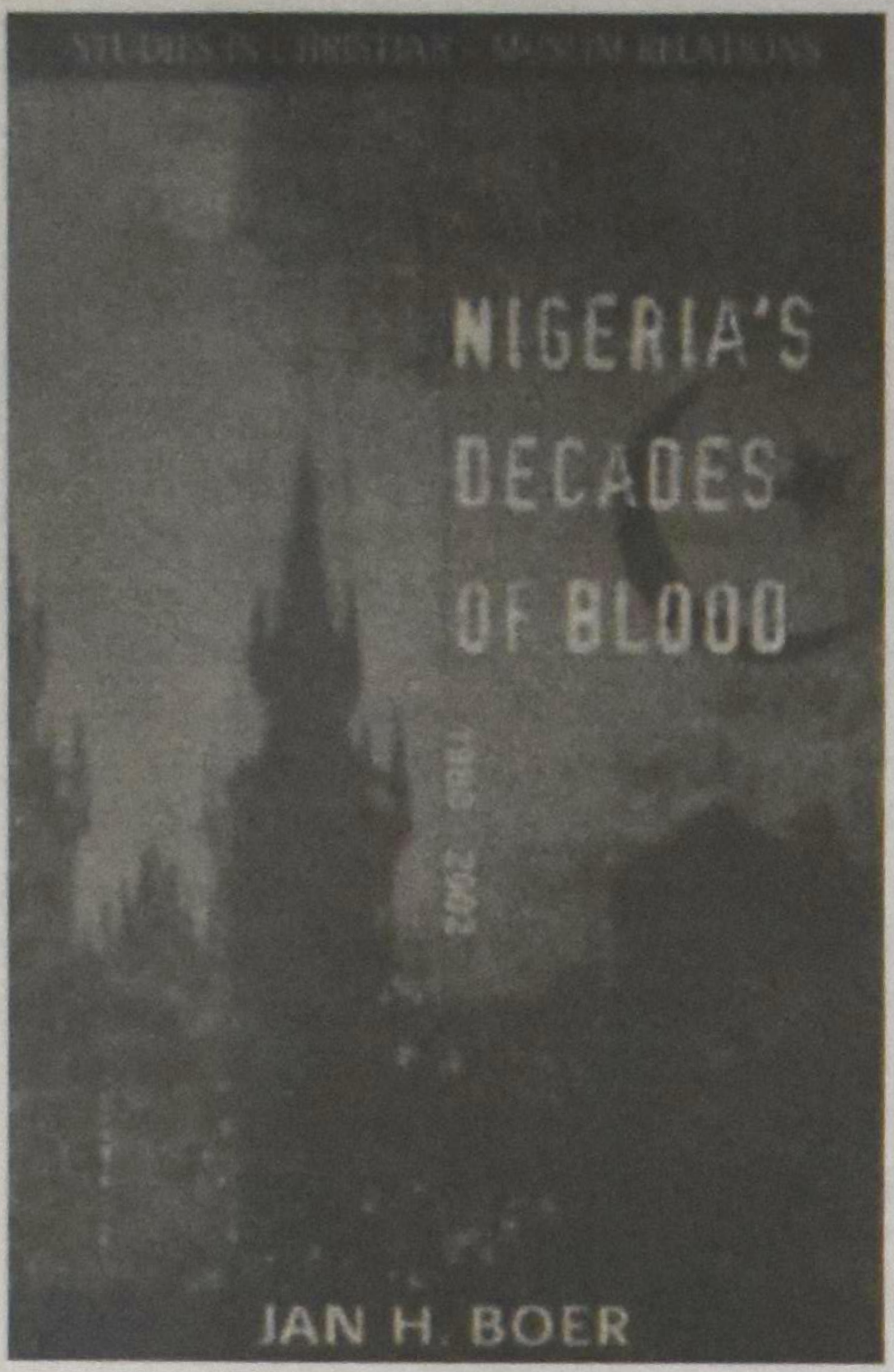
I am not swayed by the argument that the abortion issue has been overblown and that many other issues are more important. *LIFE* is the issue. Life is *the* issue. If you don't respect unborn life as God's and not ours to snuff out, it skews your thinking on all other foundational issues. The slope is indeed slippery. First millions of babies; then euthanasia of the elderly; the "right to die" of those in serious pain; the "necessity" of aborting or euthanizing the handicapped. The wanton ease with which even multiple murders are now committed, too, has a direct connection to this devaluing of life. What could be more fundamental than that? We indeed now live in a culture of death. And we just turned a frightening corner.

We hold responsible the leaders of other countries who have practiced genocide; they nurtured the climate for such deaths and signed laws allowing the practice. If I were President Obama I would not want the pro-life laws I had struck down in the last five months on *my* conscience. In four years, will those new deaths be less serious?

Marian Van Til worked for Christian Courier *from 1984-2000, and preceded Harry der Nederlanden as its editor. She now lives in Youngstown, NY. She may be contacted by email at: mvantil@roadrunner.com or via her website: www.wordpowerpublishing.com*

Review

Why violence in Nigeria



Jan H. Boer, *Studies in Christian-Muslim Relations* (Belleville: Essence Publishing). Vols. 1-3

Reviewed by **Bert den Boggende**

The series consists of 8 volumes. Vol. 1, *Nigeria's Decades of Blood 1980-2002* (2003, 155pp, $17.95), delineates various riots in several northern Nigerian states. Since Muslims and Christian perceive facts differently, Boer decided to discuss their differing interpretations in vols. 2 and 3, *Muslims: Why the Violence?* (2004, 193pp, $19.95) and *Christians: Why the Violence?* (2004, 334pp, $34.95).

Boer, presently living in Vancouver, was a missionary-theologian in Nigeria for about thirty years, starting in 1966. He intended this series in the first place for the Nigerians, as a tool to bring about peace in a country wracked by violence. This primary purpose contributed to the fact that no map is included, which for North Americans is somewhat of a handicap. The essence of Boer's message to Christians "is 'wholism', while to Muslims it is 'pluralism'." (1:14) While the events concern Nigeria, the conflict between Christians and Muslims has much broader applications.

Some background

A brief introduction of Nigeria's early history would have been helpful. Here are a few salient details. Nigeria suffered badly from slave raids. Very often the Fulani-Hausa tribes sold these slaves to Arabs and Europeans. When the British arrived in the 17th century they found a "Muslim slaving culture...that created much havoc in the Middle Belt." (3:203) As the riots indicate, the resulting distrust between the tribes still exists. The British began their rule in the mid-19th century, amalgamating in 1914 several areas into the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. In 1960 it became a federal republic, which since then has experienced military as well as civilian governments. Christians and Muslims, holding different views about the federal and state governments, have accused the governments of contributing to the bloodshed through their actions, non-actions, and partiality. Economically the country shifted from subsistence farming to an oil-based economy, which, Boer posited, was "ruined by outrageous corruption, extreme devaluation and an external debt burden." (1:13)

In the 13th century the pastoral Fulani, originating in the Senegal-Gambia area, began moving into Northern Nigeria, where the tsetse fly stopped their movement. In the early 1800s they took control of the Hausa area and mixed with them. These two tribes are the ones most often mentioned by Boer. Islam, introduced from Chad in the 11th century, is professed by about half the total population but by the majority in the North.

Christianity, introduced centuries later, is professed by the majority in the south but has been steadily moving northward. Northern Muslims feel threatened by this encroachment. Muslims often argue that they are the country's majority (the statistics are an issue of debate) and that therefore their views should be incorporated more than they have been hitherto. Christians strenuously oppose this argument. Living relatively peacefully together in the South, Muslims and Christians clash in the North, threatening the unity of the country.

Indigenes with their traditional religion complicate this volatile mixture. Northern Muslim rulers have often denied them their rights to have their own chiefdoms, resulting in resentment. Although traditional religion is declining, both Christians and Muslims "still hold tight to some form of paganism – just in case the Christian ... or the Muslim God proves unreliable and disappointing at critical moments." (3:67)

According to Boer, "there is a great risk that Nigerians will grow tired of all the religious ruckus and either return to a sanitized form of traditional religion or to an African version of secularism." (1:15) It is on this complexity that Boer attempts to shed some light.

The framework

Boer's eight point Kuyperian framework, introduced in vol. 1, indicates that Christians and Muslims have more in common than is commonly thought. Yet, this framework also shows the significant diverging worldviews, notably in the understanding of pluralism, human rights, freedom, religious liberty, secularism (4,5) and sharia (6,7). While Christians are often ambiguous about secularism, Muslims generally object to it, an objection Boer shares: "I submit that Christians and Muslims are both potentially better off with each other than with secularism." (1:16) Both sides also generally agree about the primacy of the religious impulse in human life. Yet, many Christians seem to apply it less consistently and thoroughly than Muslims, thinking that there can be neutrality in economics, education, politics or science.

For some, neutrality provides a solution to Nigeria's problems, but Boer rejects this dualistic solution. As vol. 2 makes clear, Muslims want to implement their own all-encompassing, wholistic view. Many Christians, influenced by American missionaries who separated the cultural from the missionary mandate that caused "much havoc in the Christian community" (1:21), hold a dualistic perspective. While Muslims accept an antithesis, they would not accept Kuyper's recognition of common grace that "the Spirit of God reveals important truths in other world views of faith." Only Islam proclaims the truth, hence Muslim tradition allows only three alternatives: infidels must be converted, subjugated or eliminated.

Like Kuyper, Muslims emphasize the notion of community over against liberalism's individualism and therefore want to "establish all kinds of alternative structures" (1: 22) yet without giving other perspectives their due. Consequently, the combatants are no longer listening to each other. Nor is the secular Western press really listening to both sides. When it uses the term fundamentalists does it do justice?

A Muslim area in ruins, following attacks by Christians in Yelwa

One of Islam's pillars of faith encourages Muslims to care for the poor, but although they have some economic alternatives (e.g. no usury-interest) their objections to capitalism are often mere words. Harry Antonidus has frequently highlighted the negative side of Islam in *CC*, and these volumes provide enough information to sustain his comments. Boer, however, wants the reader to give a sympathetic ear to Muslims as well. Therefore, in vols. 2, 4, and 6 he has Muslims speak for themselves.

Summary of the books

Vol. 1 describes the gruesome and senseless riots, the number of deaths, burnt churches, mosques, businesses and private properties in eight geographic areas. There were different types of riots. Muslims initiated the first riots, with Christians only defending themselves and not retaliating. Later on they also initiated some riots. Riots could be intra-Muslim affairs, directed against governments, involving indigenes, or setting town against countryside. They often mutated and combined, starting, for instance, in a rural area and deliberately spread to town and throughout the state. Some took on the character of a crusade.

Reasons for the riots varied. They include economic jealousy, objections to secularism and sharia, inflammatory language, educational and health problems, and tribal rivalry. Moreover, biased media reporting, including some owned by governments, raised the tensions. Governments themselves were often biased, as were police and army, which were often unable to cope with the riots, or were called out too late, or sided with one group. Victims were sometimes prosecuted as the perpetrators. To make matters worse, Muslims sometimes hired the poor and thugs in order to achieve their ends.

It should be noted that while much of the friction can be traced to the colonial era, to Western interference and domination, the rioting did not start until after the sharia debate of 1976-7, a debate that was part of a worldwide discussion and Muslim revival (to be discussed in another review). Suffice here to say that Boer gives ample evidence how much secularism undermined Islamic communities and institutions. "From the Muslim perspective, the major context of the riots is the colonial imposition of a Christian-secular establishment that has deranged Nigerian Muslim spirituality and institutions." (2:77)

Muslim views

The British used Muslim authorities to make Muslims useful citizens for the British and instead produced zombies for the colonial system. Consequently, many

Continued on p. 18

Story

Bienke's story (part 1)

This is the first part of the life of Jacobina Wilhelmina Radsma, née Vlaar, as told to her daughter Marion

Like most people, I remember the very early years of my childhood only in fragments – in brief video clips, if you like, set against a backdrop of blank tape.... But let us start at the beginning. I will try to tell you a little of my life.

I was born to Arien Vlaar and Antje Koster on September 1, 1922 in Andijk Noord, Holland – the twelfth in a family of thirteen children. My mother used to say that I was the best present she ever had. Yes, I was born on my mother's 45th birthday, a surprise package nine months in the making. They named me Jacobina Wilhelmina; that name was almost bigger than I was, so for everyday use they called me Bienke.

Just about the earliest video clip in my mind took place when I was a three-year-old. My mother went to answer a knock on the door, and I decided to toddle after her. Mind you, this was not permitted in our house – my parents did not want any family members to answer the door with a rag-tag of kids trailing behind them. But of course I was too young to understand that, and when my mother opened the door to an older lady – whose children had probably grown up long since and moved away – she had a little page girl trotting after her. They had chatted a while when the lady suddenly noticed me. "Oh, do you ever have a cute little girl there. Can I take her with me?" she exclaimed. My mother replied, "I don't know if she wants to... why don't you ask her?" When she asked me though, I suddenly got really shy and could not answer. Instead, I quickly ran behind my mother and hid in her skirt. I remember it clearly; her skirt was so long and full that I was able to wrap myself up a couple of times in its folds. And my mother shrugged at her visitor and said, "Well, I guess she doesn't want to!"

I think she was pregnant with my youngest brother Joe at the time because a couple of months later my older sister asked me if I wanted a little brother or sister. I forget now what I answered her, but she must have told me that I needed to feed the stork. For a week or so after our conversation, I broke off a piece of my breakfast bread for the stork even though I did not at all associate stork-feeding with baby-delivery. I brought it down to the stoop on the canal side of our home; my older sister always beside me, hanging tightly to my hand to make sure I did not fall into the water during this kind but dangerous mission. Every evening I faithfully and carefully put that crust of bread by the water and every morning I ran to the stoop to see that it was gone – the stork seemed to appreciate my effort and was eating my offerings. One morning, though, I was upset to find my little crust of bread still lying there when I ran to visit the stoop. I asked my sister, "Why?" She told me that the stork would not be coming anymore, that his work was done, because he had brought me a baby brother. Although I no longer know whether she took me to see my new brother, the story of the bread crust and the stork stays with me, probably because I usually was not allowed so close to the water.

It's probably a good thing that my sister was there to protect me from the water. When I was just a little older, maybe about seven years, I always seemed to be falling into the *slooten,* or canals, surrounding our place. In those days, canals and other, smaller water channels wove through and around our village. Many of them are now filled in, replaced by modern roads. When I was a girl, though, we had to travel by water to reach our fields. We used a *schuit*, a kind of small barge powered by either a small engine or a person with a long wooden pole.

Continued in next issues

Violence in Nigeria *... continued from p. 17*

Muslims feel betrayed by some of these authorities, whose chief functions, they argue, are to protect sharia, ensure that the freedom of Muslims is not tampered with and enhance Islam. They complain that they are underrepresented in some states and that the education system, bereft of moral values, produces a mental slavery to Western-American bourgeois capitalist imperialism or to Eastern Euro-Asian Marxist "atheistic indoctrination." (2:39-42) The federal government, they posit, should be a member of the Organization of Islamic Conference, should pay for pilgrimages to Mecca, and government compounds should include space for mosques.

For Muslims, "the art of governance ought to take second place to religion." (2:133) In other words, political reality should be subservient to religion. Although the government has often favored Muslims, they feel that it has conspired with Christians against Islam. Muslims hold that Islam is the personification of tolerance, yet their theology tends to triumphalism: only victories are allowed. That may help explain why Muslims prefer to play down the role of religion and shift the blame to actors, organizations, and governments. Significantly, they refuse to accept responsibility and blame; Muslims are innocent and Islam is absolved! It is Boer's "conviction that this attitude is due to an inadequate sense of sin in Islam." (2:122)

Boer makes it clear that there are quite a few sects that hold divergent views. More extreme Muslims, often poorly schooled and holding a strong sense of martyrdom and, fearing no death, believe that "there is no difference between the Islamic revolutionary act and the political act." (2:150) Their provocation of other people and authorities are not infrequently objected to by other Muslims. Yet Boer wonders if "moderate" Muslims are "secretly grateful for the dirty work their Fundamentalist co-religionists do for them." (2:123)

Christian perspectives

Christians generally are opposed to these Muslim arguments. In vol. 3 Boer provides a brief chapter on Christian self-critique, something that is missing in Muslim critique. Some put the blame for the riots squarely on Christians and posit that the average Muslim in a higher position becomes more Muslim, while the average Christian becomes less Christian. They have five key areas of concern: domination, intolerance, violence, suspicion and anger. Muslims, they feel, have a natural instinct for domination, must be masters and cannot be servants, since sharia outlaws subservience and dependence. Their fear is not without substance. The Mecca Conference of World Islamic Organization and the London World of Islam Festival planned an anti-Christian jihad: Muslims should take over schools and hospitals, substitute Christian names, replace bibles, circulate false propaganda, ridicule Christians, and orchestrate unprovoked attacks (3:37-8). In addition, non-Muslims in an Islamic state could not be full citizens, should be treated as stateless, could stay only on the basis of agreement, could hold no key positions and no political rights, should be taxed more heavily, and could not be elected or in cabinet. Not surprisingly, Christian missionaries should be unwelcome, Christian literature banned, and Christian activities monitored (3:42). "Non-Muslims were meant to feed and sustain the power quest of the ruling class." (3:187) Christians feel they would be discriminated against, even that they would be wiped out, and that the social structures would be challenged.

Unfortunately, some of the accusations are based on false and spurious documents that are readily believed, disseminated and not checked. In other words, at times Christians and truthfulness are at variance. Like their Muslim counterparts, Christians have a tendency to externalize causes and blame other agents. Thus violence is often exclusively blamed on manipulation, or foreigners, or hoodlums, leaving religion off the hook.

There can be no doubt that Nigeria, nearly equally divided between Christians and Muslims, experiences a clash of worldviews. Can the two worldviews exist side by side? In these three volumes Boer posits but does not elaborate upon that possibility until several volumes later. But that won't be easy, for as one author stated, the "purpose of this campaign of political manipulation of religious sentiments is to entrench religious conflict in all facets of national life." (3:254). Several times I thought that this manipulation had much more to do with power than with religion. That is perhaps an indication of how closely the various aspects are intertwined and that Muslim-Christian relations are not a picture in black and white.

The books can be ordered from Jan Boer at Boerjf@hotmail.com, who also has a CD available with material not included in the volumes, or from Essence (www.essencegroup.com; email: publishing@essencegroup.com).

Bert den Boggende (bertdenb@yahoo.com) has a Ph.D. in Britsh history and is a retired teacher who still does some substituting. He lives in Brooks, Alberta.

When the generation gap comes to church

Rachel Boehm Van Harmelen

"No longer just a problem for families, the generation gap has donned casual business attire and come to work," state Beverly Kaye, Devon Scheef and Diane Thielfoldt in "Engaging the Generations." According to these authors, an organization that fails to actively engage across generations fails to thrive. When cultural generations clash at work, outcomes include conflict, misunderstanding and miscommunication. Talented workers leave for greener pastures, and those who remain lose their motivation.

But it isn't only the workplace that suffers when generations can't get along. When the generation gap comes to church, it can wreak havoc with a congregation's well-being.

Rev. Adrian Van Giessen, Regional Team Leader – Eastern Canada for Christian Reformed Home Missions, believes that churches, like other organizations, have good reasons to be concerned about the generation gap. But the church's reasons are rooted, first and foremost, in God's Word. "Using the analogy that Paul uses in Romans 12 of the church as a body, a healthy church not only recognizes different spiritual gifts as important but also the experiences and wisdom that various generations bring to the body," Van Giessen says.

Programs like girls and boys clubs, youth groups, women's and men's Bible Studies, seniors' activities and Sunday Schools have sprung up over the years, targeting specific generations with age-appropriate programming. These programs are important and necessary in nurturing people along their faith journeys, but now many churches are seeking a place where they can bring the generations back together.

Multigenerational worship

"Members representing different stages and ages in their faith journey ought to learn from one another," says Irene Bakker, a member of Hebron Christian Reformed Church in Whitby, Ontario. Bakker chairs a committee in her church that was established to plan multigenerational worship. Hebron's leaders identified a need for parents and children, young and old, youth and seniors, to engage in "spiritual conversations" across generations. Worship seemed like a good place to start that dialogue.

"Worship is one setting where we may have as many as four or five generations present in the same space," says Bakker. "Worship plays a key role in our faith formation, and multigenerational communal worship more accurately reflects the unity and diversity of the body of Christ."

Bakker and her committee intentionally design worship with all generations in mind. The committee itself has members representing all the different generations in the church, something that Bakker says has led to many interesting conversations as services are planned.

"We have a large range of ages in our congregation and many different musical tastes," Bakker says. "One of the most challenging aspects has been finding songs that all generations know and sing well. In addition, it has been difficult to engage both children and mature seniors with the same sermon."

But the intentionality of their worship design is having a positive impact, and the blessings for the church are clear. Bakker says the church has seen a new eagerness in young people coming to worship. From handing out bulletins to collecting the offering and helping to write songs, they participate in worship, are blessed and are a blessing to others. Because the committee incorporates worship activities that appeal to diverse learning styles and life experiences – from drama to art – a broader range of individuals can now use their gifts within the worship service and beyond. Bakker's committee is reviewing their work in the coming months so they can learn from their experiences over the past year. "I feel like we are still figuring out how to do this," Bakker says.

A common mission

Van Giessen believes that efforts like Hebron's to bridge the generation gap can go a long way to strengthening churches. "As a church planter who has spent a lot of time in emerging churches, I've seen and experienced the blessings that come when people, old and young, work side-by-side on a common mission. When people from all age groups recognize the need for various gifts and experiences to help make the church work, ministry flourishes and generational differences seem to melt away."

Karen Wilk, Pastor of Community Life and Discipleship at The River Community Church in Edmonton, Alberta, is committed to nurturing that model of ministry in her own congregation. "God's Kingdom includes all ages," Wilk says, "From generation to generation – the Scriptures tell us – we are blessed and enriched by each other's perspectives."

A few years ago, Wilk participated in a peer learning group funded by the Christian Reformed denomination's Sustaining Pastoral Excellence program. Together with colleagues from other churches in her region, Wilk and her peers explored the topic of multigenerational ministry. "This really helped us think through the Biblical, theological grounding for being multigenerational," says Wilk. The pastors who participated in the group continue to reap the rewards of applying their learnings within their congregations, says Wilk. "It has helped us keep other age groups in mind when planning and thinking about church life."

Multigenerational ministry is something that comes quite naturally in a newly established church like The River CRC, says Wilk, but it is crucial for any church's ministry – even older, more established churches. "Multigenerational ministry is in our DNA," she says. "We have youth in our worship bands, doing audio-visual, leading children's ministry, and participating with our service projects."

Mentoring

Connecting old and young across the generations also presents valuable opportunities for mentoring, says Van Giessen. "Especially among the younger generations, like the Millennials, there is a hunger and deep desire to walk and live closely with older folks who are willing to love and affirm them."

In "Engaging the Generation," Kaye, Scheef and Thielfoldt suggest that informal mentoring allows for the transfer of new skills and insights – something that is desperately needed in the church today. While retired folks can mentor younger people, youth also have skills to share. At River Community Church, for instance, youth and seniors mentor each other through prayer

Continued on p. 20

And then there's Pastor Jerry's idea of pastoral excellence . . .

For a different view, visit

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SUSTAINING Pastoral EXCELLENCE

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Classifieds

Pastoral excellence *continued*

partnerships. In many churches, Millennials (see sidebar) are teaching their congregations how to harness the power of the Internet to accomplish ministry goals.

Living out the gospel together

"There is a human tendency for each generation to believe and act like the church exists just for them," says Van Giessen, who adds that many North Americans view church through the lens of consumerism. "Contrary to how we often act, the church doesn't exist to serve our needs or suit our tastes, but rather to glorify God by living out the gospel together."

Van Giessen is looking to younger people today to bring a fresh perspective to our understanding of Christian community. "They don't want to be segmented," he says. "They want to experience church in ways in which the generations love and learn from each other."

Maybe, like Van Giessen, the church needs to embrace the wisdom of youth. When the generations clash in your congregation, try bridging the gap with love and learning. Be warned, though: you may be transformed by the experience – and your church may be, too.

Human Resources in the 21st Century, Marc Effron, Robert P. Gandossy, Marshall Goldsmith (Published by John Wiley and Sons, 2003).

Rachel Boehm Van Harmelen is a writer and consultant specializing in communications for non-profit organizations. She and her husband, Peter, have four children and live in Fall River, Nova Scotia, where they attend All Nations Christian Reformed Church.

The Generations in Your Church Today*

A cultural generation is a cohort of people whose youth was shaped by a particular set of events and trends. Because of shared experiences, generations develop similar values and approaches toward life.

The Silent Generation (born between 1933 and 1945)

This generation grew up in the years following the Great Depression. The harsh economic climate of childhood taught them discipline and self-sacrifice. Over the course of their lives, this generation saw their affluence increase.

The Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964)

Boomers grew up in a time of unprecedented economic prosperity and post-war hopefulness. Typically raised in nuclear families, most had stay-at-home moms. Boomers worked hard and were rewarded for it.

Generation X (born between 1965 and 1976)

Divorce and working moms became the new normal for this generation, and this generation demonstrates characteristics of independence and resiliency. Many Gen Xers saw their parents laid off during a major recession, and many graduated from university to find few jobs waiting.

The Millennials (Born between 1977 and 1998)

Raised in a child-centric world, this generation has been showered with attention by the adults in their lives. Surrounded with technology from birth, they are more techno-savvy than any previous generation. Involved in multiple social, sports and school activities from a young age, this generation excels at multitasking.

*Adapted from descriptions of generations provided in "Engaging the Generations" (Beverly Kaye, Devon Scheef and Diane Thielfoldt) and "What You Need to Know about Mentoring the New Generations" (Devon Scheef and Diane Thielfoldt)

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Hans Snoek

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No gifts, please, your presence is all that is desired.

Hans Snoek's mailing address:
Box 423-5647 Main St, Orono ON L0B 1M0

Grace VanderNagel

is celebrating her **85th Birthday** on June 29, 2009.

We, her family are thankful to the Lord for all the wonderful years that he has granted her and for the blessing that she has been to all of us.

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Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise! His greatness no one can fathom! Psalm 145:3

April 8, 1959-2009

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We rejoice with thanksgiving to our faithful Saviour and Lord for our parents and grandparents

REV. JOHN AND JEAN VAN HEMERT

Wedding text, Prov. 3:5-6
Trust in the Lord with all your heart.... And he shall direct your paths.

Our prayer is that our Lord continue to bless you and use you in his service.

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Address: 1101 Terrace Dr. Lynden WA 98264
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Obituaries

Port Alberni May 29 2009

MARGARETHA JANSMA (nee **Alblas**)

passed away on 29th of May 2009.

Margaret came to Guelph Ont. Canada with her family in 1956. In the mid-1960 she moved to Vancouver B.C. then onto Port Alberni, where she married Jan Jansma. Together they raised a family of 3 children, Melvin J. Marianne C. and David M. An added joy was the seven grandchildren that were able to visit frequently.

She passed peacefully away in her sleep, safe in the arms of Jesus.

The Jansma & Alblas families

Address: J.Jansma, 6195 Georgia Rd, Port Alberni BC V9Y 8K7

TOM RIEDSTRA

Peacefully at his home, Tom went to be with his Lord on Wednesday June 3, 2009 in his 71st year. Predeceased by his wife Anne (2001) and his infant son, Colin (1974).

Loving and cherished husband of Christine,
Beloved father of Drew (Marie), Greg, (Deb), Athena (Jeff).
Dear stepfather of Kim (Steve), Janice (Steve), Lisa (Peter), and David (Crystle).
Loving grandpa to 20 grandchildren.
Will be missed by his brother, sisters and many friends.

Funeral service was held at CrossPoint Christian Reformed Church, Brampton, ON on June 6, 2009.

Address: 9573 Winston Churchill, Brampton ON L6X 0A4

THEA KINGMA (nee **Swart**)

Do not fear for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. Isaiah 43

On May 22, 2009, Thea Kingma at the age of 77 years went to be with her Lord and Saviour.

Thea was the beloved wife of Harry Kingma;
she will also be greatly missed by her children:
Joyce (John) Van Essen; Lou (Geri), Gloria (Dale) Melenberg; Trish Durocher (Bill) and Sid (Joanne);
her 15 grandchildren and one great-grandson.

A memorial service was held at Trinity Christian Reformed Church, Edmonton, Alberta, on May 27, 2009.

Correspondence address: 14424-62 St. Edmonton AB T5A 2A8

Obituaries

Rekken, Gelderland Jan.13, 1935 — Brighton, Ontario May 19, 2009

So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my right hand.
Isaiah 41:10

On May 19, the Lord took home to eternal glory

ENGBERT RHEBERGEN

at the age of 74

Son of the late Peter & Hendrika Rhebergen.

Missing him, but rejoicing for him are his siblings and in-laws
Anita
Sina Rhebergen
Gerrie Boschman
Gerald & Frances
Mary Rhebergen-Smit & Albert Smit
Diane Hesselink
Diny Reitsma
George & Grace
Leni Rhebergen
Elly & Ralph Hoftyzer
Bert
John & Rita
Tine & Harry Houtman
Peter & Cathy

Predeceased by siblings and in-laws
Johanna & Holger Larsen, Berend, Bart Boschman, Johan, Bill Hesselink, Sid Reitsma & Henry.

We pray that God will comfort his wife Ina and family with the loss of a loving husband, father and grandfather.

Correspondence address:
Mrs. Ina Rhebergen
1204 D J Whites Rd RR 3
Brighton ON K0K 1H0

1935-2009

GERRIT JAN SMIT

"Safe in the arms of Jesus"

The Lord called home Gerrit to his eternal home on Sunday May 3, 2009 in his 74th year after courageously fighting 14 years of ALS also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease.

Loving husband and soulmate to:
Sandra Smit (nee Dykstra)
Loving and caring father to:
Ron & Laurie Smit, *Goodwood, ON*
Linda & John Zwaagstra, *St. Anns, ON*
Charlene & Jake den Hollander, *St. Anns, ON*
Rosalie & Robert Brinkert, *St. Anns, ON*
Carolene & John Ryzebol, *Mt. Albert, ON*
Irene & Craig Somers, *Uxbridge, ON*

Proud and loving grandfather to 19 grandchildren, one grandchild of whom has gone home to join our Lord and Saviour in Heaven.

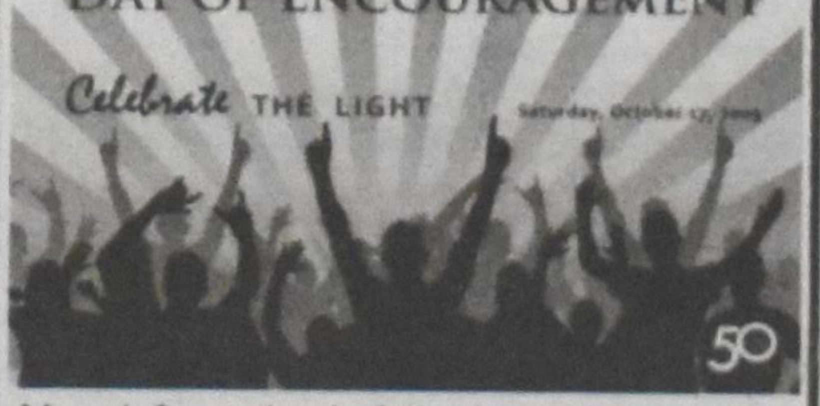
Proud and loving great-grandfather to 2 great-children.

A Celebration of Gerrit's life was held on Wednesday May 6, 2009, at Bethel Christian Reformed Church, Newmarket. Pastor Harry Salomons officiated.

Condolences and memories may be forwarded to: Sandra Smit, 266 Goose Alley Lane Goodwood ON L0C 1A0

In lieu of flowers donations to the ALS Society of Ontario Durham Walk or at website: www.walkforals.ca can be made.

DAY OF ENCOURAGEMENT



More information in following issues.

Classifieds

YOUTH DIRECTOR

CLINTON CRC seeks a dynamic and energetic leader for our youth and young adult ministries. We are praying for a person that has a love for Christ, a passion for youth, good interpersonal and leadership skills. Working with an advisory committee you will develop a relational ministry from a reformed perspective.

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or email to clintoncrc@tcc.on.ca and we will send the description to you.

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to join our ministry team. For more information please contact us at 905-877-4322 or at gcrcrecruiter@live.ca

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Please contact:
Randy Klassen
CHRP Associate Director-Human Resources
905-892-4332
rklassen@mutualsupport.net

Mutual Support is a member of the Ontario Association of Residences Treating Youth.

Classifieds

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION
Christian Courier is published on the second and fourth Monday of each month. Copy deadline for each issue is 9 a.m. Wednesday, 12 days prior to publication date.
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or email as above.
See website for more information
www.christiancourier.ca

Career Opening

Teaching Principal

Thunder Bay Christian School located in the city of Thunder Bay along the beautiful shores of Lake Superior in Northwestern Ontario is currently searching for a Teaching Principal. Thunder Bay Christian School is a CSI and OACS-member school founded on Reformed principles, where learning takes place in a Christ-centered atmosphere, preparing students for lives of kingdom service. TBCS has been serving the Christian community in Thunder Bay since 1962. Current enrolment is 140 students from JK to 10.

The ideal candidate will be an experienced administrator, with strong organizational, educational, communication and leadership gifts. This position is divided between 50% administration and 50% teaching. Interested applicants should send a letter of application, resume, statement of faith, philosophy of education and references to the following contact:

Thunder Bay Christian School
RR 2 37 Cooper Road
Thunder Bay ON P7C 4V1
Fax: (807) 939-2843 (School)

Mr. Fred VanElburg,
Board Chair
Email: fjelburg@hotmail.com
Ph: (807) 577-4969

Application Deadline: July 4, 2009. Contract begins August 1, 2009

For more information on the school you may visit our website at: www.tbaychristianschool.ca

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Christian Credit Union Ltd.
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jveldkamp @alberta-cu.com
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SHALOM MANOR FOUNDATION

Shalom Manor

DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

The Shalom Manor Foundation is seeking an experienced development director and fund developer to develop and implement the recently established Shalom Manor Foundation and its program for Shalom Manor, a Christian long-term care community. Responsible to the Foundation Board of Directors, the successful candidate will participate in capital campaigns, promote planned giving and the established endowment, as well as increase opportunities for sustained operational funding within the Reformed Christian community and elsewhere. The successful candidate will embody commitment and understanding of the Reformed Christian community, be a motivated and strategic thinking individual with excellent donor relations skills and possess the ability to achieve financial goals by planning, implementing and managing fund development strategy. This is a .5 FTE position.

For a complete job description visit our website at www.shalommanor.ca .

Qualified candidates should forward a resume and cover letter with salary expectations to:

Mr. Ron Vahrmeyer, Chair
Shalom Manor Foundation
12 Bartlett Avenue
Grimsby, ON L3M 4N5

Closing Date: **August 28, 2009**

We wish to thank all applicants for their interest and effort in applying for this position. However, only candidates selected for interviews will be contacted.

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We currently offer Royal Bank of Canada's prime plus 1% (not to exceed 7%)

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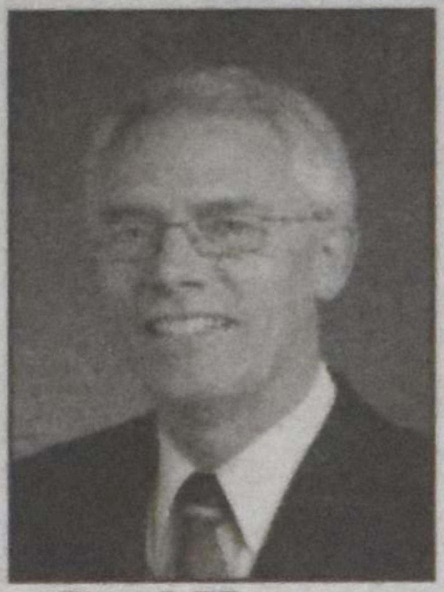
Visit our website at **www.ElimVillage.com**

ELIM Village

A Christian Retirement Community



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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

July 1 Frisian Picnic starting at 11 am at Pinehurst Lake Conservation Area, **Paris**, Ontario. Contact fyskedei@hotmail.com

July 12 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Henry R. DeBolster will be preaching.

Oct 3 The next Netherlands Bazaar will be held in the Thornhill Community Centre, 7755 Bayview Ave. in **Thornhill**, Ontario

Nov 20 Christian Festival Concert at 7:30 pm at the Roy Thomson Hall, Toronto. Call 416-636-9779 or email landmkooy@rogers.com More in details in upcoming issues.

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News

This church has left the building

Foreclosures have forced some US churches to meet in homes or cafes. Now, others are joining in – willingly.

G. Jeffrey MacDonald (CSM)

When Barry Diamond first told fellow ministers that his church was preparing to leave its 12,000-square-foot rental space in April and worship instead in members' homes, they warned him he was "committing ministry suicide."

But Pastor Diamond and The Village, as his non-denominational church in Las Vegas is known, have survived. Fifteen homes now hold intimate services twice a month. On other Sundays, they dip into funds previously earmarked for rent and use them for special events and outreach, such as a May block party for local African refugees. Now other church leaders want to know how they might follow suit.

The church is not a structure

Leaving a building with no plans for a new one used to be a hallmark of a failed congregation. In this recession, however, a growing number of hard-hit churches are struggling to pay rents and mortgages. That has some thinking about the formerly unthinkable: being a church without a building – and they are getting encouragement from building-free congregations who wouldn't have it any other way.

Since the economic downturn began, six financially stressed churches in the United States have sought advice from The Well in California's Orange County. It's a 57-year-old Southern Baptist congregation that quit its $5,000-per-month lease in 2005 and formed what has become a network of five house churches. Sensing a need among financially strapped churches, Pastor Ken Eastburn launched a website in April – leavethe buildingblog.com – to assure struggling churches there's spiritual life after bricks and mortar, even if his congregation can't offer as much youth programming as a those with a facility of its own.

Churches that are partially or entirely building-free come in a variety of forms:

- The one-year-old Origin Community Church meets in a Rocklin, Calif., coffeehouse. Childcare happens in a retrofitted school bus and a motor home parked outside.
- The Outdoor Church, launched last summer in West Virginia's Hampshire County, meets at least once a month on hiking trails, in canoes, or in another adventurous natural setting.
- Cornerstone Community Church in Simi Valley, Calif., is saving millions of dollars by expanding into an outdoor amphitheatre rather than a new building.

For congregations new and old, going building-free has financial advantages. Origin Community Church, for instance, gives 50 percent of its collection to outreach projects. The Village in Las Vegas has slashed overhead expenses from 70 percent of its budget to just 30 percent, leaving the savings for such outreach projects as a refugee center renovation in Phoenix and orphanage construction in Mexico.

Boosters of the building-free model also tout the spiritual benefits. At The Well, groups embrace spontaneity, such as when worshipers cut prayers short one day to help a neighbour paint his fence.

"The kingdom is about participation and about sacrifice," says Greg Boyd, pastor of Woodland Hills Church in Maplewood, Minn. He's interested in exploring a building-free church model for his 3,000 congregants. "We may. . . get rid of the building at some point because it could get in the way."

Sudoku 9x9 - Medium (139874481) www.sudoku-puzzles.net

4					6	5	8	
	7			5		1	9	
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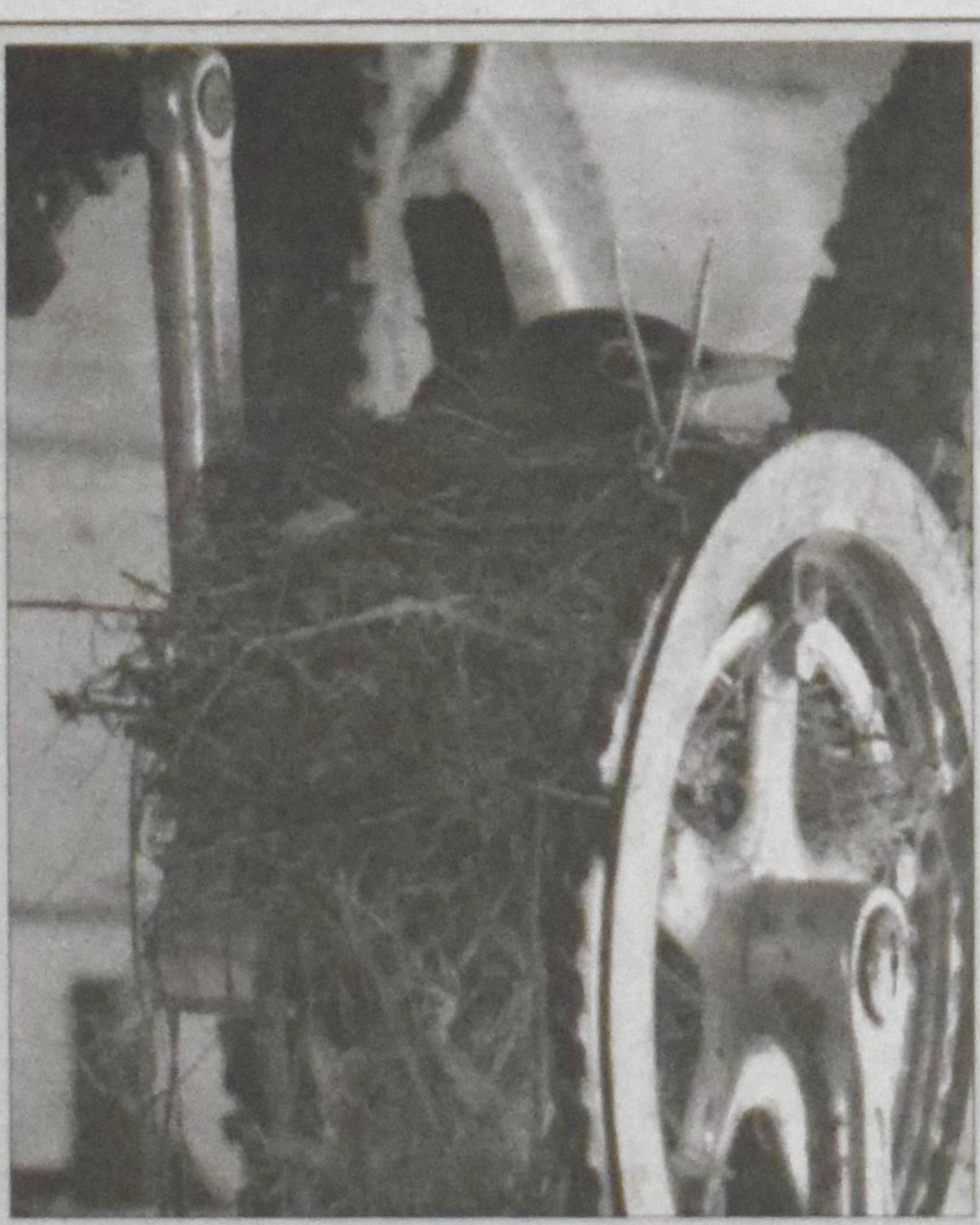
	9	1	5					3



My father told me, "Always store your mountain bikes upside down on proper hooks." I did, and now the sprocket is covered with grass, mud, robins, and their leavings.

Curt Gesch
Telkwa, BC

Odds and Trends: The photo edition

I spent part of May volunteering at a small Christian university in Mkar, Nigeria, the front gates of which are shown in this picture. It is amazing that many churches and Christian schools and a Christian university have emerged in the short time since pioneering missionaries such as Johanna Veenstra arrived in the 1920's. Nonetheless, there are many challenges – not the least of which is the power. The local power company is off far more than it is up – we need UPS's on everything and backup generators. Teaching can also be challenging. I observed a programming class which was taught in the computer lab with a whiteboard and paper and pencil since the power was out most of the class. I listened this morning after chapel as the Vice Chancellor encouraged the faculty and staff to keep forging ahead despite the many challenges.

I hope to write more about my experiences in Mkar in future columns.

Derek Schuurman
Hamilton, ON

J. EMILIO FLORES FOR THE NY TIMES

Residents in Paramount, California, a suburb of Los Angeles, are used to a strange sight: Zambonis on the street. The well-known ice-resurfacing machines, with a top speed of nine miles per hour, are made in a near-by factory and tested in the suburbs. Despite the recession's impact on other vehicle manufacturers, the small, family-owned Zamboni factory has been steadily rolling out the same 250 machines per year as it has for the past sixty years. Many Canadians are surprised that Zambonis are made in the United States, quite far from naturally occurring ice.

An Ontario company based in Elmira called the Resurfice Corporation is owned by the Schlupp family. Although they make as many machines per year as the Zamboni family, the Schlupp name is virtually unknown. Don Schlupp says they are used to their machines being called Zambonis; "we call it the Kleenex syndrome," he says..

(with files from the NY Times)